THE LADY EVELYN

MAX PEMBERTON

Dora
Evelyn
Vincent
Thelma
Lillian
Emma

THE LADY EVELYN

A Story of To-day

By

MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "The Hundred Days," "Doctor Xavier," "A Gentleman's Gentleman," "A Puritan's Wife," Etc.

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(Facsimile Page of Manuscript from THE LADY EVELYN)

He climbed upon the old stone parapet looked down straight to the black silent pool below the arches. So dark was it in the shadows that the keenest eye might not have perceived a human thing there. Gann Ord, however, saw the thing as clearly as in the daylight – a woman's fair head with great sodden leaves about it and streaming black hair caught up upon the ripples. A shudder of awe indescribable came upon him as he looked. For the woman was dead, he said – had been long dead & yet her voice spoke to him.

He knew that she was dead for the water lapped upon her half-closed eyes & the fair head turned slowly as the eddies swirled about it. Every right instinct told him that this was a vision & not

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PROLOGUE

THE FACE IN THE RIVER

The porter did not know; the station-master was not sure; but both were agreed that it was a "good step to the 'all"—by which they signified the Derbyshire mansion of the third Earl of Melbourne.

"Might be you'd get a cab, might be you wouldn't," said the porter somewhat loftily—for here was a passenger who had spoken of walking over: "that'll depend on Jacob Price and the beer he's drunk this night. Some nights he can drive a man and some nights he can't. I'm not here to speak for him more than any other."

The station-master, who had been giving the whole weight of his intelligence to a brown paper parcel with no address upon it, here chimed in to ask a question in that patronizing manner peculiar to station-masters.

"Did his lordship expect you, sir?" he asked with some emphasis; as though, had it been the case, he certainly should have been informed of it. The reply found him all civility.

"I should have been here by the train arriving

at half-past six," said Gavin Ord, the passenger in question—" it is my fault, certainly. No doubt, they sent to meet me——"

" The brown shay and a pair of 'osses stood in the yard more'n an hour," exclaimed the porter with just reproach. " I'll tell Mr. Jacob. He knows his betters when he sees him, drunk or sober——"

" Thank you," said Gavin quietly, " but I will not put his knowledge to the proof. After all, it's only five miles, you say——"

" And a public-house at Moretown if the dust sticks in your throat. You'll do better walking than up alongside old Jacob at this time of night, sir——"

" Had we known that his lordship expected a guest we'd have answered for a carriage," added the station-master, still apologetically.

The tall, fair-haired Englishman perplexed him. He hardly knew whether he addressed a Duke or a commoner. The voice and manner suggested the former; the intention to walk spoke of a vulgar habit rather befitting his lordship's curate than the honored guest of Melbourne Hall. Gavin Ord, upon his part, perhaps, delighted in perplexing people. He quite understood the kind of curiosity he had aroused; and, refusing to gratify it, he snatched up a light dressing bag; and leaving directions for his heavier luggage to be forwarded in the morning, he set off briskly upon the high road to Moretown, beyond which, as all the world knows, lies the Manor of Melbourne.

"Going to make a long stay, sir?" had been the amiable station-master's last shot.

"Oh, I may settle down there for a long time," said Ord in reply; and this news was all over the village in an hour.

Strangers upon the road to Melbourne Hall were not so many that one should escape remark.

"If he's for the Lady Evelyn," the blithe porter confessed over his cups at a later hour, "she might go farther and get a worse-looking man. Gave me a shillin', he did, and carried his bag hisself. That's what I call a gentleman, now."

Unconscious of this tribute to his qualities, Gavin Ord was then more than three miles upon his road to Melbourne Hall. A hot day of August had given place to a delicious night, fresh and cool and redolent of sweet perfumes. The moon stood high above the horizon, shining with glorious mellow light upon the gathered sheaves and the grattan where the wheat was garnered. So plain were the hill-tops to be seen that the very flocks could almost be numbered upon them; while the bare walls of limestone, the tors of spar, and the higher mounts were veined as by rifts of jewels, giving back in glittering flashes the moonbeams they had husbanded. The roads themselves were eloquent by night. When a farmer's cart went rumbling by, Gavin could hear the echo of the horse's hoofs and the rolling sound of wheels for quite a long time.

He was a man of redoubtable physique, trained by laborious days at home and abroad to the finer qualities of his endurance; and nothing was

more to his liking than this lonely pilgrimage to a splendid house wherein he believed that an advantageous welcome awaited him. A stranger to Lord Melbourne, he never allowed himself to forget that his own talents and achievements had made this visit possible and opened to him the doors of a house which few even of the aristocracy now entered. For Gavin Ord was callen in London the first among the younger school of architects—an artist of prodigious originality and daring, and one with as many sides to his talent as a diamond has facets. Already had Burlington House heaped her honors upon him. The great Church at Kensington would, he believed, stand as his memorial to all time. But for a prodigality and a refusal to consider a mere matter of money, his plans for a new cathedral in the North would certainly have been accepted by the committee. As it was, critics said, "There is the man of tomorrow." He liked to hear them say it, for he had a great conceit in his art if none for himself. Something of the spirit of the old-time builders moved within him. His imagination dwelt in lofty temples, roamed in vast aisles—looked down upon men from a masterpiece of spires. He was but a servant, if only the stone which dominated men's hearts.

And now this famous old recluse, this eccentric unknown Earl of Melbourne, had summoned him to save the stately Melbourne Hall from its only enemy—time. He could not have found a more congenial task upon all the continents.

There can be no journey more pleasant than

that which carries us a stage upon the road to our ambitions. Every event of the wayside is then an adventure to us; every inn at which we rest seems to offer us ambrosia. Here was Gavin Ord, at ten o'clock of the night, as good a walker upon the road to Melbourne Hall as any trained athlete out with the lark for a morning breather. Five or ten miles to go, it mattered nothing to him. He had forgotten already the five hours in a stuffy train; his mind was set upon the beauties of the moonlit landscape, the fine wooded slopes of the hills, the twinkling lights in the hollows, the dark towers of the scattered churches—more than all, upon the distant goal and the reception which would await him there.

How earnestly had the old Earl implored him to go to the Manor!

"Here is the finest Tudor house in England," he had written; "you can save it. Make it your home and learn to love it as I do. They tell me that in your leisure you ride and shoot. I will introduce you to the finest fencer in Derbyshire, and you shall tell me what you think of the pheasants. Don't expect to find a house-party. I see few people. I desire to see fewer. My daughter will play tennis with you, and, if you are a golfer, there are lean long women on the hills who talk of nothing else but hazards and whins. These preach sermons in stones. Come and hear them, and my motor shall show you Derbyshire. But, above all, become the servant of the Manor, as every true artist must be."

The letter of a man, Gavin said to himself when

he read it. He liked it best because there was no gilt-edge of money upon it. The Earl's prodigious wealth had been the one blot hitherto upon the fair panorama of his desires. "There will be a host of flunkies in red breeches," he had thought, "and every one of them will look the question, 'How much is he good for?'" He knew that the present Master of Melbourne Hall had come to the estate and the title almost by accident late in life, and after an adventurous career which men spoke of openly in clubs, but rarely in private life. A wild man who had been everything from a discredited attaché at Bukharest to an equally unsuccessful miner in Australia —this was the third Earl of Melbourne.

. . . . . .

And what of his daughter, the Lady Evelyn?

There were but wild fables spoken about this unknown girl and the secluded life her father compelled her to live at the Manor House. Some said she was the daughter of a Roumanian gypsy whom the Earl had married after his disgrace at Bukharest. Others declared that her dead mother had been an actress who had enjoyed a brief spell of notoriety in Vienna and thence had been driven out by the infatuation of an archduke. None knew the truth, but there were many to suggest what the truth might be. Openly and scandalously, as the world will, idle tongues hinted that the Earl must have some good reason for his eccentric conduct. There were even stories that the Lady Evelyn was unmistakably a gypsy girl herself. "As brown as a walnut chiffonier,"

said little Backbiter at the Club. The fellow had never been within fifty miles of Melbourne Hall; and if he had met the Earl, he would have gone down on his marrow bones to him.

Gavin Ord recalled some of these stories as he followed the tortuous road and left the solitary village still farther behind him. They did not interest him. He had gone into Derbyshire to see not a woman but a house. Delight that he should be chosen for guardian of such a national treasure as Melbourne Hall went with him upon his way. He must be now, he thought, but a mile from the Manor gates. The road had become narrow and closely bordered by leafy elms. No longer could he see the moonlit heights or the twinkling lights in the valleys. There were no kindly beams to guide his steps. In weird darkness he followed the dusty track and pressed on toward the Manor. The rustling of leaves sounded almost like a human voice in his ears. He liked to think that Nature was still awake and speaking to him.

So it is evident that he possessed that quasi-divine attribute, imagination. His mood of thought responded instantly to any change, atmospheric, or of the light of the heavens. The sunshine could ever build temples of success for him; the twilight rarely failed to bring the question, what is the good of it all, of ambition and the stress and strife of arenas. In the night he would awake to remember that all men must die. In the daytime he would laugh at death and all the vain problems of the hereafter. That Melbourne Hall, approached in this gloom of a summer's

night, should provoke no evil thoughts but only those of good omen, seemed a new witness to the pleasure with which he contemplated his stay there. He would accomplish something amid those ancient stones by which men should remember him. The aspiration quickened his step. A turn of the road revealed the lodge-gates, with a lighted window and a pleasant cottage. He entered Lord Melbourne's park and discerned the Hall, dim and stately and starred with lights, across the little river which stood for a moat before its walls.

This, then, was his goal, this superb fabric which the genius of the mediæval age had bequeathed to England and to posterity. No words could rightly have described the emotions which stirred his imagination as he stood to contemplate the jagged line of building and battlement, chapel, tower and stable, which his hand should snatch from the greedy hand of time. The very park, with its soft grasses, and deer in shadow pictures beneath the trees, could conjure up a vision of knights and pages and stately dames and all the witching pageantry of half-forgotten centuries. The great house itself might have been the house of a thousand mysteries, locked in banded coffers, enshrined in ghostly walls—crying aloud none the less to him who would listen to the tongue of their romance. Gavin Ord stood in an ecstasy of homage to worship at the gates of such a temple as this. And, standing so, he heard a woman's cry.

He had walked across the park with slow steps and come to the narrow bridge of five Roman

arches which spanned the shallow river—shallow, save for one deep pool over which many a fisherman must have thrown a skilful fly. Standing by the balustrade to contemplate the picture, his delighted eyes traced every tower and pinnacle of Melbourne Hall with an artist's ecstasy—thence looked out over the moonlit park to glades of surpassing beauty and scenes which the centuries had hallowed. How inimitable it all was—the mighty yews about which Elizabeth's courtiers had grouped; the groves which had listened to many a child of Pampinea—the fearsome walls, what tragedies, what comedies, had been played within them! Even a dullard might contemplate the scene with awe. Gavin Ord was no dullard, and the spell it cast upon him was such as he had never known in all his life. So entirely did it claim his mind and will that when he heard a woman's low cry beneath the very bridge he stood upon, he scarcely turned his head or gave the matter a thought.

What had happened; whence came the sound? Being repeated, he could no longer ignore it. In truth, it awed him not a little; for it was not the voice of a woman in danger but of one asking his pity, his help, as it seemed, in a low whispering voice which he now heard more clearly than if a strong man had shouted at him. Taking one quick glance at the river, Gavin declared that the cry could not have come from there. Splashing and leaping over mossy boulders, a child might have waded across the stream, he thought. Then whence did the cry come? Turning about, to the

right, to the left, he discovered himself to be still alone. It was the voice of imagination he began to say; and was about to quit the place when he heard it for the third time, and so unmistakably, that he no longer doubted it to be human.

Some one called to him from the river below the bridge.

He climbed upon the old stone parapet and looked down straight to the black silent pool about the arches. So dark was it in the shadows that the keenest eyes might not have perceived a human thing there. Gavin Ord, however, saw the thing as clearly as in daylight—a woman's fair head with great sodden leaves about it and streaming black hair caught up upon the ripples. A shudder of awe indescribable came upon him as he looked. For the woman was dead, he said—had been long dead, and yet her voice spoke to him.

He knew that she was dead, for the water lapped upon her half-closed eyes and the fair head turned slowly as the eddies swirled slowly about it. Every right instinct told him that this was a vision and not a truth of the night. He listened for the voice again; but it was silent now. As it ceased to speak to him, the spell vanished. He ran round quickly to the river bank and clambered over the slippery stones to the pool's edge.

It was black as night and void as the ether.

. . . . . .

Gavin Ord was not a nervous man and very far from a superstitious one.

When he had quite assured himself that he had been dreaming, his first act was to return to the path and laugh aloud at the whole venture.

"Melbourne Hall is generous to me," he said; "here are the very ghosts coming out to welcome me."

None the less he tried to remember what he had eaten in the train for dinner and whether his recent nights had been late or early.

"I shall get to bed at ten here," he said to himself, "and put in a good walk before breakfast. I have been doing a good deal and I never was great at night work. Of course, if I told anyone, I should be written down a liar. It's always the case when you hear or see anything the other man has not seen or heard."

He caught up his bag and marched on resolutely up the wide gravelled drive by which you reach the great gate of the Manor. A loud bell answering to his touch awakened splendid echoes in the courtyard of the house and set the dogs barking within. When a footman opened to him, he discovered that Melbourne Hall was a building about a quadrangle and that its main door admitted him no farther than to the great square court of which the chapel and the banqueting hall were the chief ornaments. Above the latter, lights shone brightly in many windows. But the courtyard itself lay in darkness.

"Say that Mr. Ord is here," Gavin instructed the footman, and added: "I am very late, I fear; I was stupid enough to miss the afternoon train."

The footman, shutting the door with a solemn

formality, called another to his aid that the dressing case might be safely conveyed to the guest's bedroom.

" 'Is lordship was sayin' you wouldn't come, sir. Longish walk by Moretown too. We'd have sent the motor but the ' shuffer ' don't like late hours. 'Is lordship is now in the boodore along of the Lady Evelyn. This is Mr. Griggs, the butler, sir——"

Gavin was not particularly interested in the fact; but the butler in question had no intention of being ignored. A fat and pompous man of flat and florid visage, he stood, in majestic pose, at the head of the short flight of stone stairs leading to the boudoir, and his attitude no archbishop could have bettered.

" Mr. Gavin Ord, is it not? " he asked.

Gavin said that it was so.

" We kept dinner back ten minutes, sir—I trust there has not been an accident."

" No accident at all—go and tell the Earl that I am here."

Mr. Griggs looked as though he had been shot.

" James will do that," he retorted loftily—waving his hand as a conductor waves a baton.

The obsequious footman strolled off to do the majestic man's bidding and Gavin meanwhile found himself in the banqueting hall, an old Tudor apartment he had admired in many pictures but now entered for the first time. The banners of three centuries hung in tatters from its oaken ceiling; the musicians' gallery stood as it was when fiddle and harp made music there for the seventh

Henry, but Gavin resented the fashion of electric lamps none the less and instantly resolved to change them—in which intention the fat butler interrupted him with the news that the Earl awaited Mr. Ord in the long gallery.

"Her ladyship is there too, sir. Perhaps you will be taking supper afterwards."

"Nothing to-night," replied Ord quickly; "I shall dream enough in the old house without that."

"And I dare say you will, sir. Many's the night I've seen a something, though I couldn't rightly say what it were."

Gavin judged that it might have been a flask of spirits which thus troubled the good man's dreams; but he made no comment as they mounted a broad staircase, and passing through a dainty little room in one of the turrets of the house, entered the superb long gallery which is the very masterpiece of Melbourne Hall. The vast length of this, its glorious ceiling, the carvings in geometric tracery, the embrasured windows, the bays, the ingles—how familiar they seemed to Gavin, and yet how far from the truth of them had the drawings been! Just as a man may enter joyously the house of his dream as a very home of love and welcome, so did Gavin pass into the gallery and feast his eyes upon its treasures. Here, he said, a life's work might be done, indeed; here the ripest genius might fall and be gathered by the lap of time.

There were brass candelabra at intervals upon the walls of the gallery and little electric lamps

aglow in the sham candles above them. Far down the immense apartment, Gavin perceived the stalwart figure of a bronze-faced man and by his side a young girl, whose pose was so natural, whose manner was so clearly that of an aristocratic, that he did not hesitate to name her instantly for Lord Melbourne's daughter. Unable at the distance to see much of her face, it took shape for him as he drew nearer; and so he found himself against his will staring at her intently as one who would satisfy himself as to where and when he had seen her before. This interest he could not immediately explain; nor did her father's cordial if somewhat loud-toned greeting recall him from his vain pursuit of identity. He felt instinctively that the Lady Evelyn was no stranger to him, and yet for the life of him he could give no good account of any previous meeting.

"Welcome to Melbourne Hall, Mr. Ord—I had begun to say that you had deserted us."

Gavin stammered some vain tale of lost train and business calls; but he did not tear his eyes away from the Lady Evelyn's face.

"Great God," he said to himself at last, "that was the face I saw in the river!"

BOOK I

THE ESCAPADE

CHAPTER I

A TELEGRAM TO BUKHAREST

Upon a night of May, some twelve months before Gavin Ord had gone down into Derbyshire at the Earl of Melbourne's invitation, Count Odin, a Roumanian celebrity of evil reputation in his own country and none in others, quitted the Savoy Hotel by the Strand entrance and had just called a hansom when a well-dressed girl, whom he was surprised to see afoot, stumbled by accident against him, and nervously, yet very prettily, offered him her apologies.

Gifted with a prodigious amount of quite unmeaning gallantry, the Count bowed low and said in passable English that no harm had been done and that it should be his part to apologize.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "it is all the fault of your narrow pavements. Here is a cab. Since we are no longer strangers permit me to drive you to your destination. The night is too hot for you to walk."

The girl drew back instantly as though covered with confusion, and without vouchsafing a single

word of reply to the civil invitation, went on westward as fast as the busy street would permit her to walk. Her only desire appeared to be to escape recognition by those who passed her by. She might have been any age between twenty and twenty-five years; her hair was coal black, and her eyes were of the deepest blue. So much the Count had not failed to observe; but his curiosity was not by any means at an end. Dismissing the cab with a haste so pronounced that a fortune might have hung upon his quest, he set off down the Strand after the unknown; and was soon so near to her that his outstretched hand could have touched her as she walked.

Who was she? Whither was she going; whence she had come The meeting had been so unlooked for, it appeared to be such a very story of marvels that the man would not, dare not even now, believe in his good fortune. For three years, often by day and night, he had been dreaming of an hour when he would find the daughter of the man who had consigned a father to a living grave and compelled the son to a vagrant life. And here, in a London street, he met her face to face —not by his own desire or cleverness, but by one of those accidents which are the true tragedies of life. Never for a single moment did he doubt that she was the woman he sought. He had come to England, guarding as a precious possession a miniature painting which had been found among his father's effects. The face which he had so often looked upon in that little picture was most certainly the face he had seen for one brief in-

stant in the Strand this night. Eyes, expression, the shape of the characteristic mouth, the tiny ears, the coal-black hair, how familiar they seemed to him. "She is Forrester's daughter," he said, and walked the faster for the thought.

It was an easy task, for the girl had no idea that anyone followed her. Crossing the street by St. Martin's Church, she passed the National Gallery at the same swift walk; and neither looking to the right nor to the left, she made straight for Pall Mall and the Carlton Hotel there. At the first hazard, Count Odin believed that this was her destination, a fact which puzzled him not a little; but she passed the hotel without a glance at its doors and going on up the Haymarket, turned suddenly into one of the little courts there and was instantly lost to his view. In his turn, he recognized the place at a glance, and as though both relieved and enlightened stood a moment upon the pavement to debate the situation.

"So," he said to himself, "my lady is an actress—or would it be a chorus girl? Well, we shall soon find that out."

He strolled up the narrow alley, and coming to a broad double door of wood, saw written above it in big red letters, "STAGE DOOR," and, on a bell below, the words "Carlton Theatre." The comparative quiet of the scene, the few people about, and the darkness of the passage beyond the door told him that a rehearsal was in progress and not an actual performance. When he read the bill of the play, affixed to a dirty board, he learned that on the following Wednesday evening,

at eight-thirty precisely, Mr. Charles Izard would present Etta Romney in the new play "Haddon Hall," by Constant Hayter. Not much of a playgoer, though a recognized frequenter of those houses devoted to musical comedy, the Count asked himself if he had ever heard the name of Etta Romney before. He could not remember to have done so—but, while he stood there, the stage door-keeper came out to smoke a pipe in the alley, and to him the Count addressed himself with that disregard of diplomatic approach which is a habit of the dubious adventurer.

"The young lady who just went in—I think she is a friend of mine."

"Ah," said the stage door-keeper, without taking his pipe from his lips.

"If you could tell me her name, I would send in my card."

"No doubt you would," said the stage door-keeper.

Nonplussed, the Count stroked his mustache a little viciously and began to fumble in his trousers' pocket.

"No good," said the stage door-keeper, anticipating the offer, and then bridling up as he recognized the kind of man he had to do with, he exclaimed peremptorily:

"Come, it's time you went home to dinner, ain't it; you look hungry enough."

"I was going to give you five shillings," said the Count.

"You keep 'em for your poor old mother in the workhouse," said the stage door-keeper, and

he went within and slammed the doors—a hint that even Count Odin could not mistake.

Far from being disturbed at this honest rebuff, the Count, with an adventurer's ready resource, strolled round to the front of the theatre and consulted the play-bills there on the off-chance that one of them would enlighten him. The box-office was closed at this hour, but framed photographs of the company engaged for the new play, "Haddon Hall," decorated the pillars of the vestibule; while a large picture, full-length and conspicuously displayed, "presented" the heroine, Miss Etta Romney, to such of the curious as should care to take their stand before it. Hardly had the Count glanced at the photograph when he recognized the original of it to be the young girl whom he had just left at the stage-door.

"Forrester's daughter, beyond a doubt," said he.

He waited for no more but called a cab and drove to the telegraph office in Waterloo Place. Thence he sent a long telegram to Bukharest. It was vague in its terms and would have been understood by none but the person who read it.

"Tracked down," it said; "am remaining here."

CHAPTER II

ETTA ROMNEY IS PRESENTED

The new play, "Haddon Hall," had been announced for half-past eight precisely on the evening of Wednesday, the twentieth day of May. It still wanted a few minutes to the hour of eight when that famous American impressario, Mr. Charles Izard, permitted a waiter in the Carlton Hotel to serve him with a coffee and liqueur; while he confided to his invaluable confederate and stage-manager, Mr. Walter Lacombe, the assuring intelligence that he had no doubt either about the play or the company.

"They're ho-mo-gen-e-us," he said, lighting a cigar with comfortable deliberation; "the first act's bully and any play with that Third Act I produce. We must get something written for her to follow in. My side will take "Haddon Hall" and it will take Etta Romney. If it doesn't, I close up."

Mr. Lacombe, the stage-manager, had his own doubts, but he was far too diplomatic to express them.

"When you close up, I sell bananas," said he; "that will be in the Ides of March."

Mr. Charles Izard, who had not enjoyed the distinction of three years' idleness at Cambridge

(and so had made a vast fortune), produced those strange concatenations of sounds which served him for laughter before uttering a pious wish.

"It's the 'ides of the critics' I'd like to touch," he exclaimed with real feeling; "you know what they're going to say about this as well as I do——"

"Oh, of course," said Lacombe frankly, "they'll baste it, sure enough. No historical play is likely to please Watley. He'll say that hot blankets are the proper treatment."

"I'd like to wrap him up in 'em and smother him," interjected Mr. Charles Izard, still piously.

"That's so—he's capable *de tout*. But I fancy he will take her none the less."

"Etta Romney, why yes! I'd like to see the man who wouldn't take her. It's a woman that makes a play nowadays. If you'd more of 'em this side, you wouldn't have so many failures. In America we star the woman first and the play afterwards. Here you star the man and when all the schoolgirls have seen him, your theatre's empty."

"Exactly—this play is the exception. You've certainly cut the writing on the wall. There's no room for whiskers on your ideas."

Mr. Izard drained his coffee cup and admitted loftily that there was not.

"I'd have been a fool not to. Here's a girl comes to me out of the *ewigkeit*. No name, no story, nothing. Won't tell me who she is or where she has played before. Just says, 'I've read about Constant Hayter's play—I know Derby-

shire; I have loved the tradition of that story all my life. Money is nothing to me. Let me play the part Miss Fay Warner has given up. Let me play it at rehearsal, and then say whether you wish me to go on.' You couldn't better it in a fairy book. I see her act a scene, hear her speak twenty lines, and say, ' That's bully.' She doesn't ask a salary—why, sir, the girl's a genius born and bred—and what's more she's a lady from the top of her hat to the soles of her boots. I couldn't wish my own daughter to behave better.''

'' Something odd about her all the same,'' Lacombe reflected; '' dreadfully afraid of being known. She goes in and out of the theatre like a ghost.''

Mr. Charles Izard laughed again.

'' Well, don't she play the part of one? '' he asked affably. '' How would you have her come in and out? Whistling like the overhead? The part's herself—the Lady of Haddon. She was born to it. If that girl hasn't walked as a ghost sometime or other, put me down for twenty pounds to an hospital. And no salary, sir, not a single penny.''

'' Immense,'' said Lacombe, but immediately paused as a well-known critic passed through the hall and went out to the theatre almost adjoining the hotel.

'' There's Clayaton,'' he went on quickly, '' it's not often he sits out a sword-and-cape drama.''

'' Then he'll sit out one to-night and be ashamed of himself in the morning. Let's get, my boy, it's just on the half-hour. We must be there.''

What precisely would have happened had so great a man not been there, the merely humble individual might hardly dare to say. As events went, Mr. Charles Izard put on a light great-coat with a great deal of splendid ceremony, and giving the many-colored lackey a shilling, strolled pompously into the street with his cigar still alight. Passing His Majesty's, before whose doors the boards "House Full" were conspicuously displayed, the pair walked leisurely on to the front entrance of the Carlton Theatre, and were there gratified by one of those spectacles which London alone can display upon the first night of a new production.

Cabs, carriages, electric broughams, even the motor-cars, arrived in quick succession before the brightly lighted vestibule of one of the prettiest theatres in London. From these emerged women in blazing evening dress, men who had dined, and men capricious and irritable because they had not dined—young girls to whom all plays were a dream of delight, mere boys who already had voted the whole thing "rot." As for the critics, they were chiefly patrons of hansoms; though a few arrived on foot, two and two, each trying to learn what the other would say about a performance which many had witnessed at a dress rehearsal. Short men and tall men, bearded men and bald men, they cared nothing for the success of the play, but everything for the glory of the notices they must write. An historical drama could not fail to give them a fine opening. They lolled back easily in their stalls as men whose lit-

erary knives were for the moment sheathed, but would be busy anon.

The theatre was packed to the very ceiling when the curtain rose, and few of the amiable first-nighters were missing from the audience. Famous lawyers, doctors of letters, and doctors of medicine, editors of illustrated papers and editors of papers that were not illustrated, literary ladies and ladies who were not literary, novelists, essayists, poets, that curious quasi-Bohemian crowd which constitutes a London first-night house, stood for most of the arts and many of the sciences of our day; and yet in the main brought a child's heart to the play as Bohemian crowds will. The cynics of eighteen, mostly representing halfpenny evening papers, were among the few who denounced the drama before they had seen it. "'Haddon Hall' on the stage again—why," said they, "there have been twenty Di Vernons in our time and why should this Di Vernon find mercy?" She was already in the coach of failure so far as they were concerned. The curtain rose upon their mutterings and did not still them.

It was a pretty scene, the park of famous Haddon Hall and the meeting between pretty Dorothy Vernon and her young lover beneath the sheltering yews. The unknown *débutante,* Etta Romney, received a lukewarm welcome from the audience; but all admitted the grace of her attitudes, the charm of her voice, and the earnestness she brought to her assistance. A little amateurish in the earlier moments of the play she warmed to her work anon; and a love scene which would have

been ridiculous had it been ill-played, she lifted by natural talent to a pinnacle at least of toleration. So the curtain fell to some applause; and the great impressario, Mr. Charles Izard, again ventured the opinion that she was "bully," though his voice had not that confident ring it possessed at the dinner-table. Could the girl make a failure of it, after all? It was just possible. And undoubtedly the play was not a masterpiece.

So the Second Act passed and found him not a little anxious, and he sat far back in his box when the curtain rose upon the Third and concentrated his whole attention upon the performance. The scene was that of the Long Gallery at Haddon; the episode, a midnight meeting between Dorothy and her lover. Dressed in spotless white with the softest black hair tumbling about her almost to her knees, young and supple limbs moving elegantly, a face that Reynolds might have loved to paint, a voice that was music to hear—nevertheless all these physical attributes were speedily forgotten in the sincerity of Etta Romney's acting and the human feeling which animated it. Here was one who loved every stone of this ancient house which the quivering canvas attempted to portray; who had wandered abroad often in its stately park, who spoke the tongue of three centuries ago more naturally than her own, who had been so moved by this story of Di Vernon's life that she gave her very soul to its re-telling. From amazement the audiences passed quickly to a kind of entrancement which only genius can command.

It did not applaud; its silence was astounding—not a whisper, scarce the rustle of a dress could be heard. The spell growing, it followed the white figure from scene to scene; was unconscious, perhaps, that any other than she trod the stage; devoured her with amazed eyes; heard, for the first time, each a tale of mediæval England as neither historian nor romancer had ever told. When the curtain fell, the people still sat in silence a little while; but the applause came at length, upon a tempest of wild excitement rarely known in a modern theatre.

Who was she? Whence had she come?

A hundred ready tongues asked the question which none appeared able to answer.

There was but one man in the house who made sure of Etta Romney's identity, and he was a Roumanian.

Count Odin had witnessed the girl's *début* from a box on the second tier.

"She is a great actress," he said to his companion, Felix Horowitz, a young attaché from the Hungarian Embassy; "I am going to make love to her."

The young man looked up quickly.

"I promise you failure," he said—"a woman who can speak of England like that will marry none but an Englishman."

CHAPTER III

SUCCESS AND AFTERWARDS

Etta Romney sat in her little dressing-room when the play was over, so very tired after all she had done that even the congratulations of Mr. Charles Izard failed to give her pleasure.

Unlike the successful actress of our time, she had not yet attracted the attention of the "flower" brigade, as little Dulcie Holmes, one of her friends in the theatre, would call them; and despite her success and the astonishment it had provoked, no baskets of roses decorated her dressing-table, nor were expensive bouquets thrown "negligently" to the various corners of the room. Two red roses in a cheap vase; a bunch of narcissi, which had obviously come from the flower-girls of the Criterion, witnessed her triumph in lonely majesty. Even the redoubtable Mr. Izard, not anticipating the splendor of the evening, had forgotten to "command" a basket for his star. He, good man, had but one word for his surprising fortune. "It's bully," he said —and repeated the conviction *usque ad nauseam*.

Etta sat alone, but it was not for many minutes after the curtain fell. Little Dulcie Holmes, the artist's daughter, who had a "walking part" at twenty-four shillings a week, came leaping into

the room presently and catching her friend in both arms kissed her rapturously.

"Oh, Etta," she cried ardently, "oh, my dear —they won't go away even now. Can't you hear them calling for you?"

"They are too kind to me," was the quiet response, "and all because I love Derbyshire. Isn't it absurd?—but, of course, I'm very pleased, Dulcie."

"Think of it, dear Etta. Your very first night and Mr. Izard in such a state that he'd give you a hundred a week if you asked him. Of course, you won't play for nothing now, Etta."

"I've never thought of it," said Etta still without apparent emotion . . . and then with a very sweet smile, she asked, "What would you say if I told you that I was about to give up the theatre altogether, Dulcie?"

Dulcie opened her eyes so wide (and they were pretty blue eyes too) that the rest of her piquant face was quite dwarfed by them.

"Give up the theatre. You're joking. Here Lucy—here's Etta talking of giving up the theatre. Now, what do you say to that?"

Lucy Grey, a pretty brunette, whose share in the triumph was the saucy delivery of the momentous line, "Oh, Captain, how could you?" (she playing a maid's part for thirty shillings a week), would not believe that Dulcie could possibly be serious.

"Whatever will the papers say to-morrow?" she exclaimed. "Did you ever think she could do

it? I didn't, and I'm not going to say that I did. Why, here's Mr. Izard quite beside himself."

"And he'll be beside Etta just now wanting her to sign a three years' engagement as principal. Now, you take my advice and don't you do it, dear—not unless he'll pay you a hundred a week. That's where girls ruin their prospects, taking on things just when they're excited. If it were me, wouldn't I ask him something! Perhaps he'll play hot and cold—they sometimes do; but your fortune's made, Etta; and I can't think why you take it so quietly. How I should dance and sing if I were you——"

Etta had begun to gather up the heavy tresses of her long black hair by this time; but she did so slowly and deliberately as one whom success had neither surprised nor agitated. Could the two young girls about her have read her thoughts they would have been astonished indeed. Not idly had she asked Dulcie Holmes what people would say if she gave up the theatré entirely. For give it up she must. In one short month her father would return from the Continent. She must be at home by that time, and none must ever know that she had left her home.

"We'll talk it all over in the morning," she said, still smiling—"I want both of you to come and see me to-morrow. We shall have read the papers by that time. Whatever will they say about me?"

"It doesn't matter what they say. Everyone in London will be talking about you before the week's out. All the same, the papers are going

to be nice. Lucy's cousin was in the vestibule between the acts and he heard the critics talking. They called you 'immense,' dear. That means bad luck for the play, but everything for you. You just wait until the morning comes."

"I fear I'll have to," said Etta, with a sly look toward them; but just then there came a tap on the door and who should it be but a messenger with the intimation that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Izard expected Miss Etta Romney to supper at the Carlton Hotel as soon as she could conveniently join their party. To the extreme astonishment both of Dulcie Holmes and Lucy Grey, Etta appeared to be distressed beyond words by this customary invitation.

"Oh, I never can go; I dare not go—whatever shall I do?" she asked.

"Not go!" cried Dulcie, almost too amazed to speak; "why, of course you must go. Charles would send soldiers to fetch you if you refused. The star always sups with him on a first night. I never heard of such a thing. She talks of not going, Lucy!"

"That's the excitement," said Lucy wisely. "I should be just the same in her place. She wants a glass of wine. She'll break out crying just now if she doesn't get one."

Their solicitude for Etta was very pretty and really honest. They were too fond of her to be jealous. Women who love loyally welcome their friends successes; men rarely do. Dulcie and Lucy might say "what a lucky girl she is;" but they would not have wished her to be less so.

As for Etta herself, the invitation perplexed her to distraction. How if she met some one who knew her at the Carlton. It was very unlikely she thought. Fifteen years passed in a French convent with few English pupils do not admit of many embarrassing acquaintances. The subsequent years, lived chiefly in the park of a mediæval country house rarely open to strangers, were not likely to be more dangerous. Etta knew that discovery might be disastrous to her beyond the ordinary meaning of the term; but her cleverness told her that the risk of it was very small. It was then after eleven o'clock. She remembered that they turned the people out of the Carlton Hotel at half-past twelve.

"Tell Mr. Izard that I will come," she said to the messenger, and then to the girls, "You won't forget to-morrow. Run round early and we'll read the newspapers together. And, dear girls, we'll spend Sunday at Henley, as I promised you."

They kissed her affectionately, promising not to forget. There was not so much pleasure in their lives that they should pass it by when a good fairy approached them. Sharing rooms together, they had as yet discovered upon some fifty-odd shillings a week little of the glamour and none of the rewards of theatrical life. For them the theatre was the house of darkening hope, wherein success passed by them every hour crying, "Look at me—how beautiful I am; but not for you." They had believed that the pilgrim's way would

be strewn with gold—they discovered it to be paved with promises.

"Of course, we shall come," said Lucy in her matter of fact way; "whatever should we be thinking of if we didn't."

But Dulcie said:

"I'm going to wear my pink blouse on Sunday and the hat you gave me—didn't I tell you that Harry Lauder would be at Henley? Well, then, he will . . . and, Etta, could you, would you, mind if I——"

Etta laughingly told her that she could not, would not positively mind at all; and then remembering how late it was, she hurried from the theatre and found herself, just as the clocks were striking the quarter-past eleven, in the hall of the Carlton, standing before Mr. Charles Izard and listening but scarcely hearing the shrewd compliments which that astute gentleman deigned to shower upon them.

"You've struck it thick, my dear," he was saying. "Get twelve months' experience in my company and you'll make a great actress. I say what I mean. All you want is just what my theatre will teach you—the little tricks of our trade which go right there, though the public doesn't know much of them. Come and have supper now, and we'll talk business in the morning. I shouldn't wonder if the critics spread themselves over this. Don't pay too much attention to them—they dare not quarrel with me."

Mrs. Charles Izard, a frank florid woman, was much less discreet and much more honest.

"Perfectly adorable, my child," she said; "it was joy all the time to me. You couldn't have played it better if you'd have been born in a Duke's house. Wherever you got your manners from, I don't know. Now, really, Charles, don't say it wasn't; don't contradict me, Charles. You know that Miss Romney is going to make a fortune for you; and you're rich enough as it is. Why, child, the man's worth five million dollars if he's worth a penny. And it isn't five years since I was making my own clothes."

The supper room unfortunately put an end to these interesting revelations. Etta followed the loquacious Mrs. Izard as closely as she could, being sure that such a gorgeous apparition (for the lady was dressed from head to foot in scarlet) would divert attention from herself; and, in truth, it did so. A few turned their heads to say, "That's Izard and there's the only woman of his company who fixes her own salary;" but the supper was already in full swing and the people for the most part silent upon their own entertainment or that of their guests. Of the six or seven women who remarked the stately girl in Izard's company, the majority first said, "What a charming gown!" The men rarely noticed her. They had taken their second glasses of champagne by this time and were genially flirting with the women at their own tables. If they said anything, it was just, "What a pretty girl!"

And what were Etta's thoughts as she sat for the first time amid that garish company, typical of one of London's sets, and in some sense of

society? Possibly she would have had some difficulty in expressing them. The music excited her, the ceaseless chatter hurt ears long accustomed to silence. In truth, she had tried to depict this scene in her Derbyshire home many times since her father had shut his gates upon the world. But the reality seemed so very different from her dreams; so very artificial, so shallow, so far from splendid. And beneath her disappointment lay the fear that some accident might disclose her identity. How, she asked, if she stood up there and told them all, "My name is not Etta but Evelyn. To-night I am an actress at the Carlton Theatre, but you will know me by and by as an Earl's daughter." Would they not have said that she was a mad woman? Such a confession would have been nothing but the truth, none the less.

She had planned and carried out, most daringly, as wild an escapade as ever had been recorded in the story of that romantic home of hers, to which she must soon return as secretly as she had come. Until this moment her success had been complete. Not a man or woman in all London had turned upon her to say, "You are not Etta Romney but another, the daughter of the one-time Robert Forrester, of whom your cousin's death has made an earl." Living a secluded life in a quiet lodging in Bedford Square, none remarked her presence; none had the curiosity to ask who she was or whence she came. The very daring of her adventure thrilled and delighted her. She would remember it to the end of her life; and when she returned to Derbyshire the stimulus of it would

go with her, and permit her to say, "I, too, have known the hour of success, the meaning of applause, the glamour of the world."

These thoughts followed her to the supper room at the Carlton and were accountable for the indifference with which she listened to the praises and the prophecies of that truly great man, Mr. Charles Izard. He, wonderful being, confessed to himself that he could make nothing of the girl and that she was altogether beyond his experience. Her stately manners frightened him. When he called her, "my dear," as all women are called in the theatre, the words would sometimes halt upon his lips and he would hurriedly correct them and say, "Miss," instead. The first guess that he had made at her identity would have it that she was a country parson's daughter, or perhaps a relative of the agent or the steward of a Derbyshire estate. Now, however, he found himself of another opinion altogether, and there came to him the uneasy conviction that some great mystery lay behind his good fortune and would stand eventually between him and his hopes.

Now many of Mr. Charles Izard's friends visited his supper-table from time to time, and of these one or two were languid young men in quest of introductions. These stared at Etta, open-mouthed and rudely; but her host made short work of them and they ambled away, seeking whom they might devour elsewhere, but never with any ardor. Supper was almost done, indeed before anyone of sufficient importance to engage the great Charles Izard's attention made his ap-

pearance. At last, however, he hailed a stranger with some enthusiasm, and this at a moment when Etta was actually listening to a piteous narrative of Mrs. Charles' domestic achievements.

"Why, Count, what good fortune tossed you out of the blanket? Come and sit right here. You know my wife, of course?"

Mrs. Izard and Etta turned their heads together to see a somewhat pale youth with dark chestnut hair and wonderfully plaintive eyes—a youth whose dark skin and slightly eccentric dress proclaimed him unmistakably to be a foreigner; but one who was quite at home in any society in which he might find himself. The face was pleasing; the manners those of a man who has travelled far and has yet to learn the meaning of the word embarrassment. To Mr. Izard he extended a well-shaped hand upon which a ruby ring shone a little vulgarly, but to Etta he spoke with something of real cordiality in his tone.

"Why, Miss Romney," he exclaimed, his accent betraying a considerable acquaintance with Western America, "why, Miss Romney, we are no strangers surely?"

Etta colored visibly; but fearing a misconception of her momentary confusion, she said to Mrs. Izard:

"The Count and I ran into each other in the Strand the other day. I fear I was very clumsy."

"So little," said the Count, "that never shall I call a cab in London again without remembering my good fortune."

He drew a chair to Etta's side and sat so near

to her that even the great man remarked the circumstance.

"That's how I'd like to see 'em sit down in my comedies," he remarked with real feeling. "The young men I meet can't take a chair, let alone fix themselves straight on it. You come along to me, Count, and I'll pay you a hundred dollars a week to be master of the ceremonies. Our stage manager used to do stunts on a bicycle. He thinks people should do the same on chairs."

Count Odin looked at the speaker a little contemptuously with the look of a man who never forgets his birthright or jests about it. To Etta he said with an evident intention of explaining his position:

"Mr. Izard crossed over with me the last time I have come from America. I remember that he had the difficulty with his chair on that occasion." And then he asked her—"Of course you have been across, Miss Romney; you know America, I will be sure?"

Etta answered him with simple candor, that she had travelled but little.

"I was educated in a convent. You may imagine what our travels were. Once every year we had a picnic on the Seine at Les Andlays. That's where I got my knowledge of the world," she said with a laugh.

"Then your ideas are of the French?" He put it to her with an object she could not divine, though she answered as quickly.

"They are entirely English both in my preferences and my friendships," was her reply, nor

could she have told anyone why she put this affront upon him.

"She's going to make friends enough out yonder in the Fall," said Izard, whose quick ear caught the tone of their conversation. "I shall take this company over in September if we play to any money this side. Miss Romney goes with me, and I promise her a good time any way. America's the country for her talent. You've too many played-out actors over here. Most of them think themselves beautiful, and that's why their theatres close up."

He laughed a flattering tribute to his own cleverness, as much as to say—"My theatres never close up." Count Odin on his part smiled a little dryly as though he might yet have something to say to the proposed arrangement.

"Are you looking forward to the journey, Miss Romney?" he asked Etta in a low voice.

"I am not thinking at all about it," she said very truthfully.

"Then perhaps you are looking backward," he suggested, but in such a low tone that even Izard did not hear him.

When Etta turned her startled eyes upon him, he was already addressing some commonplace remark to his hostess, while Mr. Charles Izard amused himself by diligently checking the total of the bill.

"I could keep a steam yacht on what I pay for wine in this hotel," he remarked jovially, addressing himself so directly to the ladies that even his good dame protested.

"My dear Charles," she exclaimed, "you are not suggesting that I have drunk it?"

"Well, I hope some one has," was the affable retort. "Let's go and smoke. It's suffocating in here."

Etta had been greatly alarmed by the Count's remark, though she was very far from believing that it could bear the sinister interpretation which her first alarm had put upon it. This fear of discovery had dogged her steps since she quitted her home to embark upon as wild an adventure as a young girl ever set her hand to; but if discovery came, she reflected, it would not be at the bidding of a foreigner whom she had seen for the first time in her life but a few days ago. Such wisdom permitted her quickly to recover her composure, and she pleaded the lateness of the hour and her own fatigue as the best of reasons for leaving the hotel.

"I am glad you were pleased," she said to Izard, holding out her hand directly they entered the hall. "Of course it has all been very dreadful to me and I'm still in a dream about it. The newspapers will tell me the truth to-morrow, I feel sure of it."

He shook her hand and held it while he answered her.

"Don't you go thinking too much about the newspapers," he said, with a splendid sense of his own importance. "When Charles Izard says that a play's got to go, it's going, my dear, though the great William Shakespeare himself got out of his grave to write it down. You've done very well

to-night and you'll do better when you know your way about the stage. Go home and sleep on that, and let the critics spread themselves as much as they please."

As before, when she had first come to the hotel, Mrs. Izard defied the warning glances thrown toward her by the man of business and repeated her honest praise of Etta's performance.

"It's years since I heard such enthusiasm in a theatre," she admitted; "why, Charles was quite beside himself. I do believe you made him cry, my dear."

The mere suggestion that the great man could shed tears under any circumstances whatever appealed irresistibly to Count Odin's sense of humor.

"Put that in the advertisement and you shall have all the town at your theatre. An impressario's tears! They should be gathered in cups of jasper and of gold. But I imagine that they will be," he added gayly before wishing Etta a last good-night.

"We shall meet again," he said to her a little way apart. "I am the true believer in the accident of destiny. Let us say *au revoir* rather than good-night."

. . . . . .

Etta looked him straight in the eyes and said, "Good-night."

CHAPTER IV

TWO PERSONALITIES

Etta Romney was very early awake upon the following morning; and not for the first time since she had come to London did her environment so perplex her that some minutes passed before she could recall the circumstances which had brought her to that square room and made her a stranger in a house of strangers.

Leaping up with a young girl's agility, she drew the blind aside and looked out upon deserted Bedford Square, as beautiful in that early light of morning as Bedford Square could ever be.

How still it all was! Not a footfall anywhere. No milk carts yet to rattle by and suggest the busy day. Nothing but a soft sunshine upon the drawn blinds, a lonely patch of grass beneath lonely trees, and great gaunt houses side by side and so close together that each appeared to be elbowing its neighbor for room in which to stand upright.

Etta returned to her bed and crouched upon it like a pretty wild animal, half afraid of the day. A whole troop of fears and hopes rushed upon her excited brain. What had she done? Of what madness had she not been guilty? To-day the newspapers would tell her. If they told her father also—her father whom she believed to be snug in

distant Tuscany—what then, and with what consequences to herself! A fearful dread of this came upon her when she thought of it. She hid her eyes from the light and could hear her own heart beating beneath the bed-clothes.

She was not Etta now, but knew herself by another name, the name of Evelyn, which in this mood of repentance became her better, she thought. True, she had been Etta when she appeared before the people last night, the wild mad Etta, given to feverish dreams in her old Derbyshire home and trying to realize them here amid the garish scenes of London's dramatic life. But arrayed in the white garb of momentary penitence, she was Evelyn, the good nun's pupil; the docile gentle Evelyn awaiting the redemption of her father's promise that the gates of the world should not be shut forever upon her youth, but should open some day to the galleries of a young girl's pleasure. It was the Etta in her which made her impatient and unable to await the appointed time; the Etta which broke out in this mad escapade, ever trembling upon the brink of discovery and fearful in its possibilities of reproach and remorse. But the Evelyn reckoned up the consequences and was afraid of them.

She could not sleep again although it was then but six o'clock of the morning, and she lay for more than an hour listening to those growing sounds which are the overture of a London day. Workmen discussing politics, amiably if in strident tones, went by with heavy tread upon their way to shop or factory. Milk carts appeared with

their far from musical accompaniment of doleful cries and rattling cans. An amorous policeman conducted flirtations dexterously with various cooks, and passed thence with sad step. Then came the postman with his cheery rat-tat at nearly every house; the newsboy with the welcome cry of "piper"; the first of the cabs, the market carts, the railway vans, each contributing something to that voice of tumult without which the metropolis would seem to be a dead city.

Etta sat up in her bed once more when she heard the newsboy in the square. The papers! Was it possible that they would tell the public all about last night's performance; that her name would figure in them; that she would be praised or blamed according to the critics' judgment? The thought made her heart beat. She had been warned by that great man, Mr. Charles Izard, not to pay too much attention to what the papers said; but how could she help doing so? A woman is rarely as vain as a man, but in curiosity she far surpasses him. Etta was just dying of curiosity to read what the critics said about her when old Mrs. Wegg, her landlady, appeared with her morning tea; and this good dame she implored to bring up the newspapers at once.

"I can't wait a minute, Mrs. Wegg," she said, for, of course, the old lady knew that she was a "theatrical." "Do please send Emma up at once—it's absolute torture."

The excellent Mrs. Wegg, who had her own ideas of newspaper reading, expressed her sympathy in motherly language:

"Ah, I feel that way myself about the stories in 'Snippets,'" she said. "I assure you, my dear, that when the Duke of Rochester ran away with the hospital nurse, I couldn't sleep in my bed at night for wanting to know what had become of her. I'll send Emma up this minute—the lazy, good-for-nothin', gossipin' girl she is, to be sure. Now, you drink up your tea and don't worrit about it. I've known them that can't act a bit praised up to the sky by the crickets. I'm sure they'll say something nice about you."

She waddled from the room leaving Etta to intolerable moments of suspense. When the newspapers came, a very bundle which she had ordered yesterday, she grabbed them at hazard, and catching up one of the morning halfpenny papers immediately read the disastrous headline, "Poor Play at the Carlton." So it was failure after all, then! Her heart beat wildly; she hardly had the courage to proceed.

POOR PLAY AT THE CARLTON

BUT

A PERSONAL TRIUMPH FOR MISS ROMNEY

The Old Story of Haddon Hall Again

The Star Which Did Not Fail To Shine

Etta read now without taking her eyes from the paper. The notice would be described by Mr.

Izard later in the day as a "streaky one"—layers of praise and layers of blame following one another as a rare tribute to the discretion of the writer, who had been far from sure if the play would be a success or a failure. In sporting language, the gentleman had "hedged" at every line, but his praise of Etta Romney was unstinted.

"Here," he said, "is one of the most natural actresses recently discovered upon the English stage. Miss Romney has sincerity, a charming presence, a feeling for this old world comedy which it is impossible to overpraise. We undertake to say that experience will make of her a great actress. She has flashed upon our horizon as one or two others have done to instantly win the favor of the public and the praise of the critic."

Etta put the paper aside and took up a notice in a very different strain. This was from the stately pages of "The Thunderer." Herein you had a dissertation upon Haddon Hall, the Elizabethan Drama, the Comedie Française, the weather, and the tragedies of Æschylus. The writer thought the play a good specimen of its kind. He, too, admitted that in Miss Etta Romney there was the making of a great actress:

"But she is not English," he protested, "we refuse to believe it. An *artiste* who can recreate the atmosphere of a mediæval age and win a verdict of conviction has not learnt her art in Jermyn Street. We look for the biographer to help us. Has the Porte St. Martin nothing to say to this story? Has Paris no share in it? We await the answer with some expectation. Here is a comedy of which the Third Act should be memorable. But whoever designed the scene in the chapel is *capable de tout*. . . ."

So to the end did this amiable appreciation applaud the player and tolerate the play for her sake. Etta understood that it must mean much to her; but she was too feverishly impatient to dwell upon it, and she turned to the "Daily Shuffler" wishing that she had eyes to read all the papers at once. The "Daily Shuffler" was very cruel:

"Miss Etta Romney," it said, "is worthy of better things. As a whole, the performance was beneath contempt. At the same time, we are not unprepared to hear that an ignorant public is ready to patronize it."

Had Etta known that the author of this screed was a youth of eighteen, who had asked for two stalls and been allotted but one, she might have been less crestfallen than she was when her fingers discovered this considerable thorn upon her rose-bush. But she knew little of the drama and less than nothing of its criticism; and there were tears in her eyes when she put the papers down.

"How cruel," she said, "how could people write of others like that!" She did not believe that she could have the heart to read more, and might not have done so had not little Dulcie Holmes flung herself into the room at that very moment and positively screamed an expression of her rapture.

"Oh, you dear," she cried, "oh, you splendid Etta! Have you read them? Have you seen them? Now isn't it lovely? Aren't you proud of them, Etta? Aren't you just crying for joy?"

Lucy Grey, who had climbed the stairs in a more

stately fashion and was very much out of breath at the top of them, came in upon the climax to tell Dulcie not to carry on so dreadfully and to assure Etta that the notices were very nice. She, however, soon joined a shrill voice to her friend's, and the two, sitting upon the bed, began to read the papers together with such a running babble of comment, interjections, cries, and good-natured expressions of envy, that the neighbors might well have believed the house to be on fire.

"The curtain fell to rapturous—oh, Etta—now, Lucy, do keep quiet—her acting in the Gallery Scene—I say that I began it first—her acting in the Gallery Scene—she has a grace so subtle, a manner so winning—isn't that lovely!—now, Lucy, be quiet—we began to think after the Second Act—oh, bother the Second Act—now, there you go again—she is indeed the embodiment of that picture romance has painted for us and history destroyed—oh, Etta—!" and so on, and so on.

Etta admitted upon this that they had some good excuse for congratulating her. In the theatre she found it quite natural to listen to the girls' pleasant chatter and to put herself upon their level both as to Bohemian habits of life and odd views of the world. Away from the theatre, however, the Evelyn in her would assert itself. Despite her affectionate nature, she found herself not a little repelled by that very freedom of speech and act which seemed to her so delightful a thing upon the stage. She was too kind-hearted to show it, but her distaste would break out at intervals, especially in those quiet morning hours

when the freshness of the day reproached the memories of the night with its garish scenes and its jingling melodies. To-day, especially, she would have given much to be alone to think upon it all and try to understand both what she had done and what the consequences might be. But the girls gave her no opportunity even for a moment's leisure.

"You said we'd lunch at the Savoy, Etta——"

"And you'd drive us in the Park afterwards——"

"Aren't you really very rich, Etta? You must be, I'm sure. Do you know I have only got three shillings in the world and that must last me until salaries are paid."

"I've worn this dress seven months," said Lucy, "and look at it. Who'll write nice things about me with my petticoat in rags? Well, I suppose what is to be is to be. I'm going to the Vaudeville in the Autumn and perhaps my ship will come in."

"My dear children," said Etta kindly, "you know that I will always help you when I can, and you must let me help you to-day when I am happy—so happy," she added almost to herself, "that I do not believe it is real even now."

They laughed at her quaint ideas and would have read the notices over again to her but for her emphatic protest.

"No," she said, "we have so much to do; so much to think of. After all, what does it matter while the sun is shining?"

CHAPTER V

THE LETTER

The sunny day, indeed, passed all too quickly. A splendid telegram, fifty words long, from the splendid Mr. Charles Izard set the seal of that great man's approval upon the verdict of the newspapers.

"You have got right there," he wired, "the business follows. See me at four o'clock without fail. . . ."

"That means a long engagement," said the shrewd Dulcie, when she read the telegram.

Lucy, prudent always, thought that Etta should have a gentleman to advise her.

"Don't go to the theatre-lawyers," she said; "they always make love to you. If you had a gentleman friend, it would be nice to speak to him about it. Mr. Izard knows what he's got in his lucky bag. Now, don't you go to signing anything just because he asks you, dear. Many's the poor girl who's engaged herself when half the managers in London wanted her. I should hold my head very high if it were me. That's the only way with such people."

Etta promised to do so, and having taken them to lunch, as she promised, she found herself, at

four o'clock of the afternoon, in the elegeant office wherein the great Charles Izard did his business. Then she remembered with what awe and trepidation she had entered that sanctum upon her first business visit to London. How different it was to-day, and yet how unreal still! The little man had the morning and evening papers properly displayed upon his immense writing table; and, when Etta came in, he wheeled up a chair for her with all the ceremony with which he was capable.

"Why, now," he said, "what did I tell you? Afraid of the newspapers, eh? Well, there they are, my dear. Don't tell me you haven't read 'em, for I shouldn't believe you."

Etta admitted that she might have glanced at them.

"Every one seems very kind to me," she said. "I wish they had spoken as well of the play; but I suppose they must find fault with something. I know so little about these things, Mr. Izard."

"Then you'll soon learn, my dear. As for what they say about the play, that don't matter two cents while the business keeps up. We'll take $9,000 this week or I know nothing about it. Let the newspapers enjoy themselves while they can. They've been kind enough to you; but you're clever enough to understand the advantages my name gives you. Produce that play at any other house and let any other man bill it and they'd have the notices up in a fortnight. But they'll take just what I give 'em, because I know just what they want and how they want it. That's how we're going to do business together. You

can earn good money with me and I can find you the plays. My cards are all on the table; I'll sign a three years' engagement here and now and pay you a hundred dollars a week—that's £20 sterling, English money. If you want to think it over, take your own time. You've a good deal of talent for the stage, and my theatre is going to make you—that's what you've to say to yourself, 'Charles Izard will produce me and his name spells money.' As I say, take your own time to think it over. And don't forget you are the first woman in all my life to whom I have offered a hundred dollars a week on a first engagement."

Etta listened a little timidly to these frank and business-like proposals. Such a situation as this had never occurred to her when she left her home in Derbyshire and set out upon this mad escapade. She had asked for a hearing from a man who made it his boast that he saw and heard every one who cared to approach him. The tone of her letter, the restraint of it, the fact that she had known Haddon Hall all her life, that every bit of that splendid ruin, every tree in the old park, every glade in the gardens were familiar to her, struck a note of assent in the great American's imagination and compelled him to send for her. He believed that at the outset she would serve for a "walking on" part. When he saw her, he asked her to read a scene from "Haddon Hall" and heard her on the stage. Then he said, "Here is a born actress, and not only that but an aristocrat besides." The secrecy which had attended her application whetted his desire to engage her. "I

will play for a month for nothing," she had said. Even Charles Izard did not feel disposed to offer her a smaller sum.

And here he was talking of agreements for a term of three years and of £20 a week!

How to answer him Etta did not know.

She was perfectly well aware that her weeks in London must be few. Any day might bring a letter from her father in which he would speak of a return to Derbyshire. The mythical visit to Aunt Anne, which had been her excuse to the servants at home, would be exploded in a moment should her father return. None the less, the situation had its humors. "If only I dare tell Mr. Izard," she had said to herself, knowing well that she would not tell him unless it were as a last resource.

"You are as kind to me as the critics," she exclaimed upon a pause, which greatly alarmed that shrewd man of business—he had expected her to jump down his throat at the offer. "You are very kind to me, Mr. Izard, and you will not misunderstand me when I hesitate. I have already told you that money is nothing to me. Perhaps I am tired of the stage already; I do not know. I feel quite unable to say anything about it to-day. It is all so new to me. I want to be quite sure that I am a success before I accept any one's money."

Her reply astonished Izard very much, though he tried to conceal his annoyance. Shuffling his papers with a fat hand, upon which a great diamond ring sparkled, he breathed a little heavily and then asked almost under his breath:

"Any one else been round?"

"Do you mean to ask me have I any other offers?"

"That's so."

"As frankly, none—at present."

He looked at her shrewdly.

"Expecting them, I suppose?"

"I have never thought of it," she said, greatly amused at the turn affairs were taking. "Of course, I know that successful people do get offers——"

"But not twice from Charles Izard," he exclaimed very meaningly—then turning round in his chair he looked her straight in the face and said, "Suppose I make it one hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Oh," she rejoined, "it really is not a question of money, Mr. Izard——"

"No," he said savagely, "it's that—Belinger. Been seeing you, hasn't he—talking of what he could do? Well, you know your own business best. That man will be waiting on my doorstep by and by, and he'll have to wait patiently. Think it over when you're tossing us both in the blanket. He's a back number; I'm a dozen editions."

Etta was seriously tempted to smile at this frightened earnestness and at the great man's idea of her shrewdness. She could not forget, however, that he had given her the opportunity she had so greatly longed for to put the dreams of her girlhood to the proof. And for that she would remain lastingly grateful.

"My dear Mr. Izard," she said, "I fear you

don't understand me at all. Who Mr. Belinger may be I don't know; but he certainly has not made me any offers. And just as certainly should I refuse them if he did so. You have been generous enough to give me my chance. If I remain on the stage, it will be with you."

Izard opened his dull eyes very wide.

"If you remain upon the stage! Good God, you don't mean to say that you have any doubt of it?"

"I have every doubt."

"Have you read the papers?"

"Oh, but you told me not to pay any attention to them——"

"That's from the front of the house point of view. Don't you know that they say you are as great as Réjane?"

"I cannot possibly believe that."

"It won't be so difficult when you try. Go home and read them again and come to me tomorrow morning to sign agreements."

He was pleased at her promise to continue at his theatre and clever enough to understand her reticence.

"She's a genius," he said to himself, "and she's more than that, she's a woman of business. Well, I like her sort. When Belinger goes round, he'll get some dry bread. As for her leaving the stage—pooh! she couldn't do it."

Had he known what Etta was saying at that very moment, his self-satisfaction assuredly had been less. For when she returned to her rooms in Bedford Square she found the expected

letter from her father awaiting her there and in it she read these words: "I shall be returning to England on the 29th of June."

She had a short month, then, to live this Bohemian life which so fascinated her! And when that month was over Etta Romney would cease to be, and the stately Lady Evelyn must return.

CHAPTER VI

STRANGERS IN THE HOUSE

The news in the letter alarmed Etta not a little; but when she reflected upon it, she remembered that it was just such news as she had been expecting all along. Her adventure had been for a day. She had never hoped that it would be more. The desire to appear upon the stage of a theatre had haunted her since her childhood. Now she had gratified it. Why, then, should she complain?

True, the glamour of the stage no longer deceived her. All the gilt edge of her dreams had vanished at rehearsal. She no longer believed the theatre to be a paradise on earth. It was a somewhat gloomy, business-like, and sordid arena of which the excitements were purely personal, and concerned chiefly with individual success and achievement. These she had now experienced and found them unsatisfying. A morbid craving for something she could not express or define remained her legacy. The " Etta " in her had not been blotted out by triumph. Had she known it, she would have understood that nothing but tragedy would efface it.

This, naturally, she did not know. Believing her time to be brief, she desired to see as much of Bohemia as the numbered weeks would permit;

and she refused no invitation, however imprudent it seemed, nor denied herself any experience by which her knowledge might profit. A perfect mistress of herself, she did not fear whatever adventure might bring her. Her desire had been to do exactly what the ordinary stage girl did—to live in lodgings, to tramp about the London streets, to spend little sums of money as though they had been riches, to give a girlish vanity free rein. Sometimes she almost wished that a man would make love to her. The homage of men, she had read, always attended success upon the stage. Etta would have been delighted to evade her pursuers, to see their flowers upon her table, to read their ridiculous letters.

For the moment, however, her dramatic experiences appeared likely to be somewhat prosaic. She had answered Mr. Charles Izard with the intimation that she would give him a definite reply within a week, and with that, perforce, he had to be content. The early promise of success for "Haddon Hall" was amply justified. The business done at the Carlton Theatre proved beyond experience. There were two matinées a week, and splendid houses to boot. Etta delighted in the triumphs of these more than words could tell. The thunderous applause, the ringing cheers, the frequent calls, animated her whole being and awoke in her the finest instincts of her inheritance. She knew that she had been born an actress, and that nothing would change her destiny. All the frivolous life of the theatre could show her made their instant appeal to her senses and were en-

joyed with a child's zest. Her gestures were quick and excited, and, as little Dulcie Holmes would say, "so French." She could behave like a schoolgirl sometimes—a schoolgirl freed from bondage and ready for any tomboy's play.

This was her mood on the afternoon of the seventh day after the first production of "Haddon Hall" at the Carlton Theatre. The exceedingly "genteel" Lucy Grey had invited a few friends to tea upon that occasion; and an artist, known to all the halfpenny comic papers as "Billy," a lodger in the same house as Lucy, kindly put his studio at the disposal of the company. Here for a time gentility reigned supreme over the tea-cups. The theatrical ladies found themselves awe-struck in the presence of Etta Romney, and remained so until the amiable painter volunteered to do a cake-walk if Dulcie Holmes would accompany him. This set the ball rolling; and although gentility suffered a snub when a lady from the Vaudeville remarked that she always "gorged" currant loaves, nevertheless merriment prevailed and some striking performances were achieved. Etta had not laughed so much since she left the convent school—and she could not help reflecting, as she returned to Bedford Square, upon the vast capacity for innocent enjoyment these merry girls possessed and the compensations it afforded them in lives which were by no means without their troubles.

It was a quarter to six when she reached her lodgings. She had time upon her hands, for seven o'clock would be quite early enough to set out for

the theatre. The weather promised to become a little overcast as she stood upon her doorstep; and she was conscious of that sudden depression with which an approaching storm will often afflict nervous and highly sensitive people. Opening the front door slowly, with her eyes still watching the creeping clouds above, she became aware that there were strangers in the hall beyond, and she stood for an instant to hear rapid words in the German tongue—a language her father had always advised her to study and had insisted upon the good nuns teaching her. To-night it served her well, for by it she became aware instantly that the strangers were speaking of her—indeed, that they awaited her coming.

"Go into the room," said a voice. "I must be alone here."

Another said, "Hush, that's her step!"

Etta turned as pale as the marguerites in the flower boxes when she heard these words; though, for the life of her, she could not say why she was alarmed. Perhaps the constant fear of discovery which had attended her escapade from the beginning asserted itself at the moment to say that these strangers knew the truth and had come to profit by it. If this were so, the idea passed instantly to give place to that more sober voice of reason which asked, "How should a stranger know of it, and what is my secret to him?" Such an argument immediately reassured her; and, entering the hall boldly, she found herself face to face with no other than the Roumanian, Count Odin, who

had been presented to her eight days ago at the Carlton Hotel.

Now, here was the last man in all London whom Etta had expected to see in Bedford Square, and her astonishment and distaste were so plainly visible in her wide-open eyes that the victim of them could not possibly remain under any delusion whatever. Plainly, however, he was quite ready for such a welcome as she intended to give him, for he barred her passage up the hall and, holding out his hand, greeted her with that accepted familiarity so characteristic of the idlers who lounge about stage-doors.

"My dear lady," he said, "do not put the displeasure upon me. I come here because my friend, Mr. Izard, recommend me when I ask him where I shall find a lodging. 'Miss Romney is at Bedford Square,' that's what he says; 'go right there and you will find an apartment in the same street.' Now, isn't it wonderful? I arrive at your house by accident and here is your landlady who has the dining-room to let. You shall forgive me for that when I say that my friend, Horowitz, is with me and his sister. Why, Miss Romney, we'll be just a happy family together; and that's what Charles Izard was thinking of when he sent me here. 'Tell her I wish it,' he said; 'she's too much alone in London, and it doesn't do——'"

Etta interrupted him with a dignity he had not looked for.

"Mr. Izard would not be so impertinent," she exclaimed hotly. "Your coming or going really

does not interest me, Count. I have to be at the theatre immediately. Please let me pass!"

She tried to go by, but he still forbade her, smiling the while and seemingly quite sure of himself.

"My dear lady," he said, "you do not go to the theatre until half-past seven. This amiable person of the house has told me as much. If I am rude, forgive me. I wish to ask you to see my pictures of Roumania, a country your father once knew very well, Miss Romney, though he has not been there for many years. Say that you will come and see them to-morrow and I will ask Mademoiselle Carlotta to help me to show them to you. Now, dear lady, will you not name the hour? I shall have much to show you, much for you to tell your amiable father about when you see him again."

Etta shivered as though with cold. Never before had she known such a curious spell of helplessness as this man seemed able to cast upon her. The words which he spoke amazed her beyond all experience. Roumania! She understood vaguely that her father had lived dreadful years there so long ago that even he almost had forgotten them. And this stranger could speak of them, youth that he was, as though he held their secret. Had she wished to terminate her acquaintance with him then and there, her woman's curiosity would have forbidden her. But, more than this, the man himself attracted her in a way she could not define—attracted her, despite her early aversion from him and her sure knowledge that there must be danger in the acquaintance.

"Do you know my father, Count?" she asked presently—in a voice which could not conceal her apprehension.

"To my family he is well known, to me not at all," was the frank reply. "I came to England to make my misfortune good; but now that I come your father is not here, Miss Romney."

"Then he was not aware of your intended visit?"

"Quite unaware of it."

"You did not write to him?"

"How should I write when I do not know the house in which he live?"

"Then why do you say that he is not in London?"

He looked at her with the triumphant eyes of a man who puts a master card upon the table.

"I say that he is not in England because you are alone, Miss Romney."

Etta bit her lips, but gave no other expression to her emotion.

"A compliment to my discretion," she exclaimed with a little laugh; and then, as though serious, she said, "You will make me late for the theatre after all. Do please talk of all this to-morrow."

He drew aside instantly.

"Izard would never forgive me," he said; "let it be to-morrow as you wish—shall we say at twelve o'clock?"

"Oh, by all means, at twelve o'clock to-morrow," she rejoined and upon that she ran up the

stairs, and entering her own room, locked the door behind her.

Who was the man? How had he come then into her life? She was utterly unnerved, amazed, and without idea. But she knew that she would go to the theatre no more.

"And what will Mr. Izard say?" she asked herself blankly; "what will they all say?"

Eva was ready both to laugh and to cry at that moment. Conflicting sentiments found her sitting upon her bed, a very picture of irresolution and dismay. The deeper truths of the night were not as yet understood by her, although the day for understanding would not be far distant.

CHAPTER VII

THE NONAGENARIAN

She sat upon her bed for a little while, seemingly without purpose or resolution. The black muslin dress with the exquisite lace and suspicion of Cambridge blue about the neck, a dress in which she always went to the theatre, lay ready for her spread out upon the back of a chair. She used to say that it was the only good dress she had brought to London with her. Her desire had been to deceive herself with the pretty supposition that her own talent must earn luxuries or that they must not be earned at all.

So her riches were few. She could almost number them as she sat upon her bed, reflecting upon this astounding encounter, the threat of it, and its just consequences. When she left Derbyshire she had no thought of discovery, nor imagined it to be possible. Not a soul knew her by sight, she said. She had spent her days in a convent in France, and after that as a very prisoner in her father's house. Why, then, should she fear recognition? None the less did recognition stand upon the threshold. This foreigner she believed to be already in possession of her story. How he had gained knowledge of it, and what use he would make of it, she felt absolutely unable to say. Suffi-

cient that a malign destiny had brought her face to face and called her to decide instantly as difficult an issue as escapade ever put before a woman.

"He knows my name; he knows my father," she argued; "if he does not come to our house, he has some good reason for not doing so. In any case, I must not stop here. Oh, my dear Mr. Izard, what will you say to-night? And poor dear Di Vernon, poor dear Di Vernon, whoever will take care of her?"

She laughed aloud at her own thoughts, and, jumping up impulsively, she gathered her things together as though for a journey, though she had not the remotest idea whither she would go or how she would act. A church clock striking the hour of seven reminded her that the hours were brief and that she must make the best use of them. Had she been a man she might have remembered that if this intruder knew her father's name, he would very quickly discover her father's house, his rank, and the story of his life. But she was not even a woman, scarcely more than a schoolgirl, in fact, and terror of the present became an immediate impulse without regard to the future. She must flee the house and the mystery without an instant's loss of time. Nothing else must count against the prudence of this course. All the little things she had collected in London, the clothes she had bought there, these must be abandoned. Etta, indeed, carried nothing but her light dust-cloak and her purse when she left the house at half-past seven.

"I must write to dear old Mrs. Wegg and make

her a present,'' she said; '' she can send my things to St. Pancras Station to be called for. If I don't go to the theatre, Mary Jay will play my part. Perhaps the poor girl will make her fortune. It's an ill wind . . . no, a horrid wind, and, oh, I do wish it would blow me home again! ''

From which it will be seen that the idea of '' home '' crept already into her dizzy head and attracted her strangely. There is always an aftermath of jest, however bold that jest may be. Etta realized this dimly, though all the impressions of the theatre, its glamour and its triumphs, were too new to her to permit of any serious rival. She feared discovery simply for her father's sake. To him the theatre stood for a very pit of all that was most evil. He had, from the days of her childhood, dreaded a day which would awaken a mother's instincts in Etta and tell him that she had inherited her mother's genius as an actress. For such a reason, above others, he made a recluse of her. For such a reason, loving her passionately, he sent her to the convent school and guarded her almost as a prisoner of his house. Etta knew that he disliked the theatre greatly; but she never had his reasons, and was unaware of her dead mother's story. Had she known it, this mad escapade would never have taken place.

She left the house in Bedford Square at half-past seven furtively and not a little afraid. She had already determined to keep her own secret, and to that intention she adhered resolutely. Crossing the Square with quick steps, she stood an instant at the corner to make sure that no one

followed her. When her suspicions upon this point were at rest, she called the first hansom cab she could see and told the man to drive her to St. Pancras Station.

"And please to stop at a telegraph office on the way," she said.

The journey had been fully determined upon by this time, and she no longer found herself irresolute. It cost her much to send Charles Izard her farewell message; but she did it courageously, as one who knew that it must be done. How or why Count Odin had crossed her path she could not say; but her clever little head grappled instantly with that turn of destiny and determined to defeat it. None could harm her in her home in Derbyshire, she said . . . and to Derbyshire she determined to go.

When she entered the post-office and had dispatched her telegrams, she felt as one from whose weak shoulders a great weight had been lifted. What a dream it had all been! The hopes, the fears, the success of it. Her heart was a little heavy when she wrote down the words: "I am leaving London and shall not return—pray, forgive me and forget—Etta Romney." There would be a sensation at the theatre to-night, but what of it if the walls of her home were about her and the gates of it had closed upon her secret. She knew too little of Count Odin's story that her fears of him should be enduring.

"He has learnt something about me somewhere and wanted to satisfy his curiosity," she thought; "perhaps he was going to make love to me," an

idea which amused her, but did not appear in quite as repugnant a light as it might have done. Some whisper of personal vanity said that Count Odin was a man of the world and an exceedingly good-looking one at that. She began to see that all her fears might be mere shadows of misunderstanding —none the less, she persisted in her intention to return to Derbyshire. A sense of personal danger had been awakened; she fled from discovery before discovery could do her mischief.

There was a train to Derby at half-past eight. Etta took a seat in the corner of a first-class compartment, which an obliging guard, bidding a porter keep watch upon it, insisted upon reserving for her. The porter, good fellow, drove off the besiegers, among whom were a parson with brown paper parcels and a fussy little man who always travelled in ladies' carriages because he could have the windows up, to say nothing of old maids and their dogs and younger maids without dogs. To these the man of corduroys politely pointed out the red bill upon the window; but when a cloaked foreigner, with a hawk's beak and watery eyes, a man who must have numbered at least ninety years, persisted in an attempt to enter, then was the ancient dragged back by the flap of his coat while the magic words "reserved" were shouted in his ears.

"What you say—what—what—" the old fellow cried, exerting a surprising amount of strength for a nonagenarian, "not go in here, *accidente!*"

"Higher up, grandfather," said the merry por-

ter. "Saffron Hill goes forward—no parley Inglesh, eh—well, that's not my fault, is it?"

He took the old fellow by the arm in a kindly way (for of the poor the poor are ever the best friends) and led him to a third-class carriage at the forward end of the train.

"And a wonnerful strong old chap for his years, too, miss," he said to Etta when he returned for his shilling; "give me a shove like a young 'un he did. I shouldn't wonder if he ain't agoing to play in a cricket match by the looks of him. Did you want to send a telegram, perhaps? A surprisin' lot of telegrams I do send from the station. Mostly from gents wot has a fency for a 'oss. They takes a number horf of their tickets and backs the first 'un they sees with the same number in the noospipers. Not as I suppose you've any fency like that, miss—though young ladies nowadays do send telegrams almost as frequent as other people."

Etta laughed at this idea, but, a sudden remembrance coming to her, she asked:

"What time do we arrive at Derby, porter?"

"You should arrive at a quarter to twelve, miss."

"A quarter to twelve—oh, my poor little me, whatever will you do?"

"Not meaning to say that you've forgotten to ask them to meet you, miss?"

"Meaning the very thing—please get me a form, oh, lots of them. I must wire to Griggs. Don't let the train go until I've done it. Whatever should I do if no one met me?"

"I'll stop it if I have to hold the engine myself. Now, miss, you take these 'ere. That's the name of a Spring 'andicap winner on one of them —you scrat it out and write your own telegram. We ain't agoin' to have you out in the cornfields at that time of night, I know. Just write away and don't you flurry yourself."

Etta needed no pressing invitation. She wrote two telegrams as fast as her eager fingers could set down the messages—one to Fletcher, the coachman at the Hall, one to Griggs, the butler, who would be the most astonished man in all Derbyshire that night when he read it. These the porter gathered up together with a liberal monetary provision to frank them, and the train was just about to start when who should appear again but the white-haired nonagenarian, grumbling and shuffling and plainly seeking a carriage, despite the fact that he had been lately seated in it.

"Why, here's old nannygoat broke out again," cried the astonished porter, and running after him he exclaimed: "Here, grandfather, train goin', comprenny, inside oh, chucky walkey—now then, smart, or I'm blowed if I don't put you in the lorst luggage horfiss."

They bundled the old man into a carriage; the engine whistled, the train steamed majestically from the station.

"Good-by, London!" said Etta, sinking back upon the cushions with tears in her eyes.

But the far from docile old gentleman, who had been treated so unceremoniously, did not weep at all.

"She's going to Melbourne Hall," he kept repeating with a chuckle; "if the telegrams mean anything, they mean that."

By which it is clear that the old scoundrel had read Etta's messages which the ever-obliging porter carried to the telegraph office for her.

CHAPTER VIII

LADY EVELYN RETURNS

Mr. Griggs, the butler at Melbourne Hall, had just fallen asleep after a second glass of his master's unimpeachable port, when a footman knocked softly upon the door of his pantry and informed him that he was the proud owner of a telegram.

"For you, sir, and the boy's a-waitin' for a hanswer."

Mr. Griggs, who had been dreaming of a rich uncle in Australia, and of the fortune this worthy had bequeathed to him (by which he would set up a public-house in Moretown and acquire a masterly reputation), murmured softly, "No jugs in the private bar," and awoke immediately in that state of irritable stupor which even a moderate allowance (and Mr. Griggs' glasses were true bumpers) of ancient port may provoke.

"Whatever do you want, comin' creeping in here like a fox with the gout?" he asked angrily; "is the 'ouse on fire or is Partigan took with the hysterics? Whatever is it, James?"

"It's a telegrarf," replied James loftily; "perhaps you're a little 'ard of 'earing after port wine, Mr. Griggs. The boy's a-settin' on

the step whistlin' airs. I'll tell him to come in if you like——"

Griggs looked a little sheepishly at the bottle before him, and prudently offered James a glass.

"Them boys is born in a hurry and that's how they'll die, James. Just take a mouthful of that wine. I'm sampling it for the guvner. This'll be from him, no doubt."

To do the excellent man justice, it must be admitted that he had been sampling that particular wine during the last twenty years, and still found it necessary to continue his task before he could give a definite opinion. The telegram was another matter. Mr. Griggs read it by the aid of an immense pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, and, having read it, he uttered that exclamation he was wont to employ only upon the very greatest occasions.

"God bless my poor old gray hairs if her ladyship ain't returning this very evening. Whatever can have put it into her wicked little head to do that? Derby station at eleven-forty, and Fletcher gone haymaking to Matlock. I shouldn't wonder if the beast had been drinking," he added pompously.

James, the footman, admitted that it was very embarrassing.

"I've lived in many families, Mr. Griggs," he said, "and a deal of human nater I've learned. But this 'ere family is wholly a masterpiece. Your good health, sir, and I'm sure I wish you blessings."

"It's easier to wish 'em than to bring 'em,"

replied the philosopher Griggs. "Where's Partigan now and what's she doing?"

"She's a-participatin' in the Floral fête at the Bath-Dianner in a motor-car or something of that sort."

"She went over with Fletcher, no doubt. That's how his lordship's interests are served in his absence. Is Molly in the 'ouse, James?"

"She was takin' her singin' lesson from the horganist of Moretown half an hour ago."

"Let her sing upstairs with the warmin' pan, and quick about it too. I suppose the shuffer's not in?"

"Gone to Derby to see Mr. Wilson Barrett eat up by lions——"

"Then we'll have to send Williams, the groom, and make a tale. Lord, what a 'ouse to look after. I feel sometimes as such responsibulness will break me up into small coal, James. Just ring that bell and send Molly here. I'll give her a singin' lesson as she won't soon forget."

There never was such a ringing of bells, certainly never such a scampering of overfed menials as the next hour witnessed at the Manor. Hither and thither they went: Molly up the stairs to look out the sheets, Williams, the groom, to get the single brougham ready, James to set the boudoir straight ("with me own 'ands I done it," he said to Partigan, the lady's maid, afterwards, as though ordinary he did it with other people's hands, which was a true word), Griggs to put away his decanter and enter the kitchen in mighty splendor. Not only this, but stable-boys upon bi-

cycles went flying off to Matlock and Derby to bear the tidings to the absentees.

"Her ladyship a-comin' home," said Partigan when she heard it; "well, that do beat the best!"

"I've always said," Griggs remarked to James, when the first moments of agitation had passed, "I've always said the Lady Evelyn isn't ordinary. Just look at the antics she'd be a-doin' by herself when she thought no one was lookin' at her in the park. Carrying on like a play actress, she was, and me hidin' behind a tree, mortal feared of her throwin' of herself into my arms by mistake. What his lordship would say if I told him of this 'ere, the cherubims above us only knows, James."

"You surely ain't goin' to tell him, Mr. Griggs?"

Griggs tapped his breast with a heavy fist that seemed to make a drum of it.

"A lady's secret—they'd have to cut it out of my bussum, James."

"Then you don't think, perhaps, as she's been staying with Miss Forrester at all?"

This, however, was the beginning of a suggestion which the worthy Griggs would not tolerate at all from one he styled a menial.

"What I think is my own affair. Take my advice and hold your tongue, James. When you get to my time of life you'll know that the less you say about the ladies the better for your good health. Go and get the dining-room ready. She'll be in a rare tantrum when she comes back. They always are when they've been up in London en-

joyin' of theirselves. His lordship himself is good cayenne after a week on the Continent. It's enough to make a man take to drink almost."

The reservation was wise, for certainly Mr. Griggs had "almost" taken to drink on many occasions, stopping at the second bottle on a benevolent plea of moderation. This particular occasion, however, was not to prove one for extreme remedies as subsequent events quickly demonstrated. Having seen that all had been prepared, both within and without the house, he composed himself to a comfortable nap in his arm-chair and again had begun to dream of a rich uncle in Australia (whose continued good health he found most provoking), when a loud ringing of bells and a sound of voices in the quadrangle instantly brought him to a state of recollection, and he sat bolt upright and stared wildly at the grandfather's clock in the corner of his pantry as though its fingers reproached his tardiness.

"A quarter to two o'clock. God bless my poor old head. It must be her ladyship. A quarter to two o'clock. What would her father say to it?"

It was her ladyship, as he said—very tired, very pale, strangely quiet, and with frightened eyes, such as neither Griggs nor anyone in that house had looked upon before. Amazed to see her, dressed in no way for travelling, carrying no other luggage than the purse in her hand, the old butler simply stared as he would have stared at any bogey of Melbourne come suddenly upon him in the witching hours.

"I welcome your ladyship home," he stammered, looking anything but a welcome from his inquiring eyes, and then, most inaptly, he continued: "The trains is very late for the time of year, I must say, my lady."

Lady Evelyn merely said:

"Yes, I am dreadfully late, Griggs. Don't let anyone be disturbed. I could not touch anything to-night. My luggage is to be forwarded from London. Please see that everything is locked up. I am going straight to my room, and shall not want anything at all."

Griggs did not really know what to make of it.

"She was as white as a sheet," he told the kitchen afterwards, "and she asked me to lock up the 'ouse. Now, am I in the 'abit of leavin' the doors open or do I see 'em shut regular? Mark my words, Partigan, there's something more than her luggage she's left in London, and the sooner his lordship takes it out of the cloakroom the better.

Here was something to set the servants' hall by the ears beyond possibility of discretion. Williams, the groom, who had driven her ladyship home, added an ingredient to the sauce of their curiosity which proved appetizing beyond measure.

"There was a young man at the station wot kept hopping about us just like a 'oss about a hayrick," said he. "I could see she didn't want to take much notice on him, but what was I to do? If he'd have opened his lips, I could have given him something for hisself. But he didn't say nothing

to nobody and all she says was, ' Drive on at once, Williams, and don't stop for anyone.' Be sure I made the old 'oss slip it. He come along for all the world as though he were riding to 'ounds and me in the first flight."

Williams, be it observed, had not exaggerated at all. There had been a young man at the station and Lady Evelyn had been very frightened by him. What is more remarkable is the fact that she was perfectly well aware of his identity and knew him beyond a shadow of doubt for the apparent nonagenarian who had been so persistent at St. Pancras. That white-haired old man and the youth who appeared before her suddenly at her journey's end were certainly one and the same person. The only conclusion possible was this, that she had been watched closely in London and followed thence.

" It must be Count Odin," she said to herself, and upon this she tried to reason out a secret of which the key lay far from her possession. Why should the man have been at such pains to follow her if he knew her father's name, as he pretended he did? It never occurred to her untrained mind that a foreigner recently arrived from Bukharest might be quite unaware of the identity of Robert Forrester and altogether ignorant of the fact that he was Robert Forrester no longer, but had become, by a strange accident of fortune, the third Earl of Melbourne, Baron Norton, and heaven and Burke know what besides. Here had been the Count's difficulty. He had searched every directory in vain for the where-

abouts of a man he had now made it his life's purpose to discover. Knowing scarcely anyone in London, and having no particular desire to declare his presence to the Roumanian *chargé d'affaires,* his quest had been profitless until chance brought him face to face with the Lady Evelyn in the Strand. Instantly he had resolved never to lose sight of her until he had discovered Robert Forrester's house, and had asked of him that question the answer to which should tell him if his own father were alive or dead.

The Lady Evelyn, upon her part, had no share of the story, save that which her own eyes and the Count's brief words had told her. He had spoken in London of her father, it is true; but there had been no betrayal of a warm anxiety to meet him, nor had he mentioned the name except as a passport to Evelyn's confidence. The fact that she had been followed from town to Derbyshire disquieted her exceedingly by the very pains which had been taken to conceal it. No longer could she believe that Count Odin had been fascinated by her acting and had foolishly fallen in love with her. Something lay beyond, and her clever brain divined it to be a thing dangerous both to her father and to herself.

So it was not Etta Romney but my Lady Evelyn, grave and stately, and dreadfully afraid of her own secret and of another's, who returned to Melbourne Hall, and, declining the attentions of her servants, went straight up to her bedroom, but not to sleep. Whatever danger threatened her must speedily declare itself, she thought. It was

even possible that the morrow would bring it to her doors.

And if it came, her father would know that Etta Romney had been " presented " by Mr. Charles Izard at a London theatre and that she was his daughter.

He would never forgive her, she thought. It might even be that he would call her his daughter no more.

CHAPTER IX

THE THIRD EARL OF MELBOURNE

THERE is hardly a pleasanter room in all England than the old Chamber of the Tapestries they use as a breakfast room at Melbourne Hall. Situated in the west wing of the great quadrangle, and giving off immediately from the famous long gallery, its tiny latticed casements permit a view which reveals at once all the cultivated beauty of the gardens and the wild woodland scenery of the park beyond, in a vista which never fails to win the admiration of the stranger, as it has won the love of many generations who have inhabited that historic mansion.

It is not a large room, but it tells much of the story of the house, its triumphs, its misfortunes, and its glories. Here you have the time-stained arms of John, the first baron, whose cinquefoil azure upon a crimson banner had been carried high at Agincourt; here were the crosslets fitchée of the House of Mar, whose feminine representative had come south to wed the third baron in the days of good King Hal. Fair fingers had worked these tapestries long ago, waiting, perchance, for news of husband or lover whom the wars had claimed, or fighting for a King whose son would laugh at their story of fidelity. It had

been my lady's bower then, and knights and squires had doffed their caps as they passed its doors. To-day they gave it no nobler name than breakfast room, and therein, at half-past eight every morning, the Earl of Melbourne, more punctual than the clock itself, sat down to breakfast.

Now, here was a man who had been an adventurer all his life, a man of the field, the forest, and the sea; a bluff bearded man, not unrefined in face and feature, but utterly unsuited by the disposition of his will to the dignity which accident had thrust upon him, and resenting it every hour that he lived.

"What are we but slaves of our birth?" he would ask his daughter passionately. "Why am I cooped up in this old house when I might be on the deck of a good ship or under canvas in the Alleghany Mountains? You say that nothing forbids my doing it. You know it isn't true. The world would cry out on me if I cut myself adrift. And you yourself would be the first to complain of it. We owe it to society, Evelyn, to make ourselves miserable for the rest of our lives. They call it 'station' in the prayer-book, but the man who wrote that had never shot big game on the Zambesi or he'd have sung to a different tune."

Sometimes when Evelyn protested that society would really remain indifferent whatever they did, he would reply, a little brutally, that when she had found a husband it would be another matter.

"There will be two of you then to stand for the

cinquefoil,'' he observed cynically. ''I shall shake the handcuffs off and get back to the East. A man lives in the sunshine. Here he scarcely vegetates. When they inquire, in ten years' time, where the Earl of Melbourne is, you'll send them to the Himalayas to begin with, and there they can ask again. Don't lose time about it, Evelyn. You know that young John Hall is head over ears in love with you.''

Evelyn's face would flush at this; and there had been an occasion when she answered him with the amazing intimation that she would sooner marry Williams, the groom, than the young baronet he spoke of. This frightened the old Earl exceedingly.

'' Her mother's blood runs in her veins,'' he said to himself. '' By heaven, she'd marry a stable-boy if I thwarted her.''

Here was the spectre which haunted him continually. He feared to read the story of his own youth and marriage in the youth and marriage of his daughter. Notwithstanding his jests, his love for her was passionate and dominated every other instinct of his life. '' You are all that I have in the world, my little Evelyn,'' he would confess in gentler moods. He desired her affection in like measure, but had never wholly won it. Perhaps instinctively she understood that some barrier of the past interposed itself between them. Her father's defects of character could not be absolutely hidden from her. She feared she knew not what.

And if this were her normal mood, what of the

Evelyn who had gone to London at the bidding of a mad desire; who had become Etta Romney there; who had returned at the dead of night and awaited her father's home-coming with that tremulous expectation which at once could dread exposure and yet delight in the peril of it? When her first alarm had passed and quiet days had led her to believe that she dreamed the story of espionage, Evelyn could await the issue with no little confidence. After all, why should Count Odin betray her, even if he had her secret? He was a man of the world and had nothing to gain by dealing treacherously with a woman. Her father went to London so rarely that she might well deride the danger of his visits. Nothing but a clumsy accident could write that story so that the Earl might read it, she thought. And so she welcomed him home with all her habitual composure, and upon the morning of the second day of July she found herself seated opposite to him in my lady's bower, listening to his stories of Italy and his plans for the summer and the autumn months to come.

"We ought to give some parties, I suppose," he said; "the servants expect it, and we must not disappoint them. Ask all the people who don't want to come and get rid of them as quickly as you can. I have written to Colchester about the yacht and we ought to get her in commission in August. You always loved the sea, Evelyn, and this will be a change for you. We can put into Trouville and Étretat and see what the Frenchwomen are wearing. I shall steam down to the

Mediterranean later on; but that won't be until December. We have the birds to kill first and plenty of them. Of course, I know you wanted to be in London this Spring, and it is not my fault if you did not go. This copper mine in Tuscany is going to make me as rich as Vanderbilt. I could not neglect it just because a lot of fools were driving mail phaetons in Bond Street."

Evelyn smiled a little coldly.

"Men do not drive mail phaetons nowadays," she said, "they drive motor-cars. Of course, it is very necessary for us to keep the wolf from the door—we are so poor, father."

The Earl had grown accustomed to remarks such as these, and had become skilful in evading them. He understood perfectly well that Evelyn expressed her own disappointment and that she meant to remind him of his broken promises to take a house in Mayfair for the season and to sacrifice his own pleasures at least for a few brief weeks.

"I am poor enough," he said, "to want all the money I can get. This old place costs a fortune to keep up. I mean to do big things here by and by, and twenty thousand won't be too much when they are done. Besides, it is not money that we men run after, but the gratification of our own vanity in getting it. The claims on this estate are heavy and they have to be met quickly if it is to be cleared. I backed my own opinion about this mine against the biggest house in Germany and I am coming out top all the time. If it put fifty thousand a year into my pocket,

who'll benefit by it but you? Think of that when you talk about the little crowd of paupers you want to see in London. Money's money. And precious glad some of them would be to see the color of it."

Evelyn did not contradict him. She was too weary of the subject to wish to revive it. Imitating others, whose youth had been one of far from splendid poverty, the Earl permitted money to become the guiding principle of his life in the exact ratio of its acquisition. An exceedingly rich man when he inherited the bankrupt estates of the Melbournes, each year found a waning of his natural generosity, a growth of unaccustomed meanness, and a diligence in the quest of fortune which the circumstances made almost pathetic. On her part, Evelyn was perfectly well aware that he would give no parties at the Hall this year, would not take her to Trouville, nor visit the Mediterranean in the winter. Each season found its own excuses for delay. The wretched mine in Tuscany was a very godsend when postponements of any kind troubled the Earl for a good excuse.

"I am glad you are going to do something to the Hall," she said evasively; "at least there will be the painters' society to enjoy. After that I suppose I may go to Dieppe, as Aunt Anne wishes. It will be quite a dissipation—under the circumstances."

He looked at her rather sharply.

"So you went to London after all?" he said. "I thought you meant to put it off?"

"To put it off! That would have been a familiar task. I live to put things off. There is no one in all Derbyshire who has so many excuses to make as I have."

"My dear Evelyn, you know perfectly well why I dislike all this kind of thing."

"Indeed, I know nothing, except that you dislike it. This is the third year that you promised to take me to London and have disappointed me. If there is any reason that keeps us prisoners when others are free, would you not wish me to know of it? I am your daughter, and surely, father, you can speak to me of this."

"My dear little Evelyn," he said, hiding his embarrassment as well as might be, "you are talking the greatest nonsense in the world. If you want to go to London, you shall go to-morrow. Take a house, a flat, an hotel, anything you like—only don't ask me to go with you. I am past all that sort of thing. A city stifles me; the fools I find in it make me angry. If you like them, go and see them. I have been alone enough in my life not to mind very much being alone again."

This quasi-appeal to her pity was his invariable argument. He would have been embarrassed had she accepted his proposals; but he knew full well that she would not accept them. And so he made them with a generosity which cost him nothing but a momentary tremor of doubt lest her answer should disappoint him.

"Oh," she said, rising from the table and going to the window to look across the park, "I am satiated with gayety—and Aunt Anne is a very

paragon of giddiness. We went to bed every night at half-past nine and got up at six; and, of course. Richmond is quite Mayfair when you learn to know it."

The Earl, rising also, would have laughed it off, despite the ridiculous nature of the effort.

"Poor old Anne is not as young as she was," he exclaimed lightly. "I dare say you found her a little tiresome. Well, I suppose you came home when you were tired of it?"

"Yes," said Evelyn, without turning round, "I came home when I was tired of it."

He could not see the deep blush upon her cheeks, nor would he have understood it had he done so. Indeed, she was truthful so far as the letter of the truth went. A visit to Richmond had been the excuse which carried her from Melbourne Hall. Three dreary days she had spent in a prim house overlooking the Thames. The home of the skittish Aunt Anne, whose sixty years did not forbid her still to look out, like Sister Mary, for an heroic "Him" upon her horizon. From Richmond, Evelyn had gone to the Carlton Theatre; and now, for an instant, even here in her own home, the Etta Romney could return to delight in her adventure.

What a sensation had attended her disappearance from London? Safely guarded in her jewel-case upstairs were cuttings from the newspapers of the days succeeding that mad flight. Be sure that the great Charles Izard made the most of his misfortune. He had believed that Etta Romney left him at the bidding of caprice and at the

voice of caprice would return to him again. His shrewd mind instantly perceived that the truth would best serve him on this occasion; and though he was not on very good terms with truth, the quarrel was soon patched up. To all the reporters he told the full story of this captivating romance.

"The girl came to me from nowhere," he said frankly, "and where she has gone God knows. I gave her a hearing because she wrote me the cleverest letter I have read for many a long day. Her home was in Derbyshire, and this was a Derbyshire play. I saw her act one scene in my theatre and said that she was 'bully.' She had the best send off I can remember. Then comes the night when I am strung up on my own hook. She expresses her trunks and quits. About that I know as much as you do. Her traps were left at St. Pancras station, and a letter says that she has given up the theatre. Well, I don't believe it. A girl who can act like that will never give up the theatre. In one month or six she'll be starring in my plays. She cannot help herself; she's got to do it."

Nothing whets the public's appetite so surely as curiosity; and all London had grown curious about Etta Romney. Discerning men, who had but half-praised her when she first appeared, hastened to declare that her loss was irreparable. Less responsible journals gave coherent accounts of the whole business, written in the back office by gentlemen who knew nothing whatever about it. The affair, at first but a nine days' wonder, became a standing headline when the editor of a popular

newspaper boldly offered a hundred guineas for the discovery of Etta Romney's whereabouts.

Etta read all about this in the brief days that intervened between her own return and her father's. While the woman in her rejoiced at the success they spoke of, the child failed to perceive the danger of this undue publicity or to guard in any way against it. It is true that she had been very much alarmed upon the night she fled from London; but as the weeks went by and neither word nor message reached her from Count Odin, or indeed from any of the friends she had made at the theatre, a new sense of security came to her and compelled her to delight in what appeared to be the final success of her escapade. Surely now her father would remain in ignorance of it to the end, she argued. She believed that it would be so, though whether the Etta Romney within her were really dead, she did not dare to say.

The spirit of her mad desire; the passionate longing for liberty and triumph before the world; the knowledge of the rare gifts she possessed and of the future they might win for her, were these to be forever shut behind the gates of her silent house, however beautiful that house might be? She knew not. The future alone could tell her whither the voice of her destiny would call her.

CHAPTER X

THE ACCIDENT UPON THE ROAD

Was Etta Romney dead or would the months recreate her?

Evelyn believed that they would. The intolerable *ennui* of her life at Melbourne festered the atmosphere in which such dreams as hers were born and reared. She had that in her blood which no make-believe could prison. Had the whole truth been told, it would have set her down for a gypsy of gypsies—a true child of the roadside and the caves. But the truth was just the one thing her father hid from her.

"I met your mother at Vienna," he had told her once when an illness had moved him to that affectionate confidence which weakness is apt to provoke. "She was Dora d'Istran, the most beautiful woman in the city and one most run after. You are like her sometimes, Evelyn; you have her eyes and hair, and just such a manner. She understood me as no one else in the world has ever done, not even my little daughter. I married her in the face of my family and never regretted the day. She died when you were eleven months old. I live again through that hour which took her from me every day of my life."

Here was no weak confession. Throughout his

life this man had been seeking a good woman's love. Knowing in his heart that he had done things unworthy of it, he sought it yet more ardently for that very reason. One woman, his wife, had understood him and given him of her whole soul generously. Her death left him a vagrant once more. In vain he, a miser to others, lavished generous gifts upon Evelyn, his child. "She would love me if she could," he told himself, "but there is a chord in her nature I cannot strike." A keen observer of intuitive faculty would have said that the man's nature, not the woman's, in Evelyn Forrester forbade her to respond to his affection.

Of this Evelyn herself remained quite unconscious. Fret as she might against her father's unjust and inexplicable treatment of her, she would have resented hotly the suggestion that she had not a daughter's love for him. Her very obedience, she thought, must be sufficient witness to that. Though he made a prisoner of her, she rarely uttered a complaint. His varying moods, now of doting affection, now of irritation and temper, found her patient and silent. When he did a mean thing she shuddered, but rarely spoke of it, because she knew that words would not help her. Her own life had been lived so far apart from his. She wished with all her heart that it had not been so; but she could not justly blame herself for circumstances she was in no way able to control.

This had been her attitude before her great escapade in London; it remained her attitude upon

her return to Derbyshire. She met her father each morning at the breakfast table; dined with him in solemn state at night—occasionally received visits from their neighbors, and was some times the guest of the vicar of the parish, a pleasant old Cambridge Don, by name Harry Fillimore. But in the main Evelyn lived alone, in the wild glades of the beautiful park, down by the silent pool of the river—just as she had lived and dreamed in the old days of the longing for the world, its glamour and its glories. And now she had a great secret to take to the green woods with her. Day by day, as some sylph of the thickets, the true Romany child reacted the thrilling scenes of the brief weeks of triumph in London. Her hair wild about her shoulders, her eyes reflecting the dreams, she would crouch by the river's bank and play Narcissus to the reeds.

"It was I, Etta . . . yes, yes . . . just the little Etta looking up from the waters—I went to London—I played at the theatre—they said I was a success—they offered me money—to Etta Romney, just little Etta Romney. And now it's all over. Etta is dead, and Evelyn has come back. I shall never go to London again—I shall die, perhaps, down there among the reeds in the river. Oh, if some one only would love me, some one understand me. And it's for ever in this lonely place—for ever—for ever."

Such regrets were neither hysterical nor unusual. She knew that there was some great void in her life, some desire ungratified, which must haunt her to the end; and this knowledge drove

her day by day along those paths of solitude which her father wished her to tread, though never would he have confessed as much. His lavish gifts to her scarcely won a word of thanks. When she rode a horse, it was madly, defying convention, helter-skelter across the grass lands like a Mexican flying over the prairie. She bathed in the deepest, most dangerous pools; went shooting but shot little, because her will revolted from the purposes of slaughter; would picnic in the darkest thickets and had even set up a tent and slept in it, far from house or cottage, at the height of the summer glory.

"A little madcap," the bland vicar said when he heard of it, "a regular brick of a girl, though who'd believe it when he saw her at her father's dinner table. Why, last night, sir, she sat in the drawing-room just for all the world a paragon of propriety with ten generations of grand dames to her name. I didn't dare to take a second glass of port for fear I should be jocular. And to-day I saw her flying toward Derby in the new car at thirty miles an hour. Away went my straw hat just like a cricket ball. Now, what are you to make of a young lady like that?"

Doctor Philips, the person addressed upon this occasion, confessed that you might make many things of her.

"She could earn a good living at steeplechasing, and I would pay her five pounds a week to be my *chauffeur*," he said quite seriously, "and please don't forget the ball she drives at golf.

Why, vicar, she'd give the pair of us a half. It's no ordinary woman could do that."

They agreed that it could not be, and having discussed the Lady Evelyn at great length were about to sit down to lunch together, individuals aware of their own humility in the face of a superior intellect, when Williams, the groom, came flying over from the Hall and demanded to see the Doctor instantly.

"There's bin a haccident on the road, sir," he cried breathlessly, "please come over at once—the gentleman's up at the house and the Earl away."

The doctor, wasting no words, set out with a sigh and a backward glance at the inviting table.

The Vicar said:

"Thank God—I thought that *she* had come to grief."

CHAPTER XI

A RACE FOR LIFE

The Vicar declared that he met Evelyn upon the road to Derby, "going like a volcano at thirty miles an hour;" but this was a mere figure of speech, for her little car, being of no more than ten horse-power could not possibly accomplish such speeds; nor would the winding roads about the Hall have permitted them to a larger motor. A reckless driver, if recklessness were love of the delight of fast travel, Evelyn loved horses too well to frighten them; and rarely did a coachman complain or such wayfarers as she met upon her journey do anything but applaud her. Indeed, Derbyshire had no more enchanting picture than that of this dark-haired girl, superbly gowned, as she sat at the wheel of her crimson car; while Bates, the proud *chauffeur*, gazed disdainfully, from the dicky behind, upon all the world, as though to say, "You can't beat her." And this was the more noble on Bates' part because Evelyn had twice deposited him in the ditch since the car came home. "The horrid thing will go round the corners so fast" had been her lament after these mishaps. Bates added the pious prayer that he might go round with the car on the next occasion.

Sometimes, of course, it would be Etta Romney who drove and not my Lady Evelyn at all. These were mad, wild moods and came mostly at twilight when the gloom of day crept upon the fields and the sun went down in crimson splendor. Then the wild, mad dash down tempting hills would scare the loiterers and send the jogging laborer to the shelter of the hedges. Then a cloud of dust enveloped the flying car, and the figure at the wheel might have stood for Melpomene with vine leaves in her hair. "A rare 'un she be," the countrymen would say; "went by me like a railway engine, dang 'un, her did."

Evelyn had been into Derby on the day the Vicar narrated the misfortunes of his straw hat. Having done a little shopping, she set out for the Hall a few minutes after the hour of twelve, by which time the day had turned gloriously fine with a light wind from the east and a bank of white clouds high beneath the azure, which promised welcome interludes of shade. She had a journey of twenty-three miles before her (for Melbourne Hall lies far from the little town of that name and knows it not), and leisure enough in which to do it. Business, she knew not of what nature, had carried her father to London nearly a week ago. She would be alone until to-morrow, her own jailer, she said with a pout, the mistress of hours by which she could profit so little. Her mood, indeed, had become one of cynical indifference, tempered by the reflection that this was the first visit the Earl had paid to London since her escapade. What, she asked, if a word of that story

came to his ears even now? The weeks of safety inspired a sense of security which circumstance hardly justified. She paled and trembled when she asked herself what such a passionate man as her father would do if the truth were discovered by him.

Here, truly, was no impulse to the delights of speed or to that recklessness which the Vicar chided. Evelyn drove slowly, her thoughts vagrant and wayward, her attitude that of one who has not pleasure awaiting her at her journey's end. She had traversed over twenty miles of the distance and was just looking out for that well-known landmark, the spire of the village church, when a startled cry from the usually phlegmatic Bates aroused her attention and called upon a self-possession which rarely failed her.

"A horse and carriage—bolting behind us, your ladyship—put her on the fourth—my God, he's coming right on top of us—quick, your ladyship—a horse bolting——"

He stood up in the dicky and waved his arms and continued to cry, "A horse bolting!" as though by repetition alone he would bring her to a sense of danger. Evelyn, upon her part, cast one startled glance behind her and instantly became aware of the situation. For down the road, which sloped slightly toward them, a horse bolted madly in their direction, swinging a light brougham from footpath to footpath and leaving a dense cloud of dust to bear witness to the speed. So mad was the gallop that the frightened beast, seen first at a distance perhaps of six hundred

yards, was no more than three hundred yards from them when Evelyn opened the throttle of her car to the full and sent it racing down the incline as it had never raced before. Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five miles an hour the speed indicator registered, and still the car appeared to be gaining speed. Behind, as though in vain pursuit, the thundering sound of hoofs waxed louder; and once or twice in the interludes of sounds, a man's voice could be heard crying to the horse and to those in the car incoherent words in an unknown tongue.

"Let her go for God's sake, your ladyship—let her go—he's coming up—keep to the right—don't mind the corner—we'll do it yet—" These and many another exclamation fell from Bates' volcanic lips as he clung to the dicky for dear life and tried to drive the mad horse into the hedge by the wild waving of a spasmodic arm. His appeal to her to keep to the right showed that he, at any rate, had not lost his head. Instinctive habit sent the animal flying to the left-hand side of the road as he would naturally be sent by any coachman. Though the brougham lurched wildly, the terrified horse returned to his accustomed place again and again, taking the corners in wide sweeps and increasing his speed with his terror. A great raw bony brute that had been ridden to hounds the previous winter, his gallop was that of a thoroughbred over good grass lands. Even the ten horse-power car could not keep its lead. Evelyn knew that he was overtaking her. The shadow of catastrophe seemed to creep over her very

shoulders. "Is he far off now?" she would ask Bates despairingly.

The answer, many times repeated, began to be monotonous.

"Keep to the right, milady—don't mind the corner—I'll blow the horn for you—now you're gaining a bit—oh, that's fine—let her go—we'll do it yet, milady."

Evelyn, it may be, realized her own peril less than that of those in the brougham. A man's cry, whatever reading of character might be placed upon it, seemed to her an evidence of grave danger and piteous fear. But for this, her own courage would have almost delighted in the rare sensations of speed and flight and all the doubt of the ultimate issue. Guiding her car with a brave hand, she was conscious of a rushing wind upon her face; of hedges, fields, trees approaching, disappearing, during that ominous race; of a voice speaking to her; of a question many times repeated—"How will it end? Will they be killed?" And yet the speed of it both excited and sustained her. She swung round the corners as an arm upon a pivot; hugged a difficult path with the skill of an old *mécanicien,* nursed her engine perfectly, was never flurried, never hesitating, never fearful. That which she dreaded was the long incline leading up to the gates of Melbourne Hall. The mad horse would beat the car upon that, she thought. The threatened thunder of his hoofs seemed so near to her now. She could hear the man's voice plainly, and the tongue he spoke had a more familiar sound.

The moment was critical enough. A gentle hill lay before her. She knew that a horse galloping blindly would make nothing of it, but that the little car must be slowed down sufficiently to render escape out of the question. Had there been a footpath, she would have mounted it and dared the consequences; but of path there was none. A man in her place might have bethought him of slacking speed gradually and blocking the road to the flying carriage. But Bates, her *chauffeur,* had never been upon a horse in his life. He thought only of himself and the car.

"I could feel his nose down my back," he told the Servants' Hall afterwards—to which the cook replied "Lor', Mr. Bates, how you must have suffered!" He admitted that he had done so.

"She turned into the field better than Théry himself could have done," he declared, speaking of the driver of the Gordon Bennet car. "Just when I was asking myself who'd come in for my Sunday clothes, round she goes like a top and the carriage went flying by us at a jiffy."

The kitchen listened in awe.

"I always said as she was a thoroughbred," Williams, the groom, remarked; and this opinion appeared to be general.

Evelyn had saved her car just as the excellent Bates described it. Losing ground steadily upon the hill, the end of it all seemed at hand, when she espied the open gate of a hay-field upon her right hand; and taking her courage and the wheel in both her hands, she just touched the car with the foot-brake and then swung it boldly through the

opening. A terrible lurch, a great bump over wagon-ruts and they were at a standstill in grass growing to the height of their axles. The bolting horse meanwhile went by like a shot from a bow, straight up the hill which leads to the Hall. A turn of the road hid him from their sight. They heard a loud crash and then all was still.

Evelyn sat, very pale and frightened, and trembling visibly at the thought of that which must have happened on the hillside above them. The engine of her car had stopped as they ran into the field and the imperturbable Bates immediately leaped down from the dicky and made a wild attempt to restart it.

"There wasn't a driver on the box, milady," he said, as though it were the most natural remark in the world to make.

Evelyn answered by ordering him, almost angrily, to start the engine.

"We must go to them," she said, her heart beating fast as she spoke. "I am sure there has been a dreadful accident. Be quick, Bates! Why are you so foolish? Please start the engine at once."

"I was thinking of you, milady," the man said a little sullenly. "There was two gents in the carriage. You mightn't like to see what somebody will see when they go up there."

"Don't talk nonsense," she said firmly. "I am not a child, Bates. You would make a coward of me. Let us go at once!"

Bates said no more but started the engine at once. Evelyn backed the car from the field and

drove slowly up the hill. She was greatly excited and afraid, but her resolution to proceed remained unshaken.

Who had been in the carriage? What harm had befallen him or them? The turn of the road answered her immediately. For there, white and insensible by the side of the shattered brougham, lay Count Odin, the Roumanian, and by him there knelt young Felix Horowitz, his friend, ready to tell everyone that the Count was dead. Evelyn, however, knew that he was not dead.

And tragedy, she said, had followed her even to the gates of Melbourne Hall.

CHAPTER XII

THE UNSPOKEN ACCUSATION

Count Odin had been three days at Melbourne Hall when the Earl returned. For thirty hours he did not recover consciousness; the second day found him restless and but dimly aware of the circumstances of his accident; the third day, however, recorded such an improvement that, as the evening drew on, he sent the maid, Partigan, to my Lady Evelyn begging that she would come to him.

There had been wild excitement in the house, to be sure. Tragedy is ever the delight of the servants' hall; nor was it less delightful because memorable days were few at the Manor. History has recorded that Partigan, the maid, shed tears when she heard that the young man upstairs was a foreigner and exceedingly handsome. Mr. Griggs, the butler, felt it necessary to sample divers vintages of wine and to ask repeatedly what the Earl would think of it. The maids whispered together in corners; the grooms discussed the erring horse with straws protruding from the corners of their mouths. To these worthies and to others the daily bulletin, which the shrewd, side-whiskered Dr. Philips delivered each morning as he climbed into his motor-car, became as the

tidings of a horse-race or of a royal wedding. Rumor had said that the young Count was dead when they carried him to the house. Dr. Philips declared that he would have him dancing before the month was done.

"Fracture, pshaw!" exclaimed that knowing practitioner; "they might tell you that in Harley Street, but in Derbyshire we know better. He has a skull as thick as a water-butt. Con-cuss-ion, sir, that is the matter. You may tell her ladyship so with my compliments. Con-cuss-ion is what Dr. Philips says, and if there is anyone who disputes his word, he'd like to see the man."

They carried the news to Evelyn, who had scarcely left her room since this amazing adventure befell her. A brief account of the accident obtained from the lips of young Felix Horowitz, Count Odin's friend, narrated the simple circumstance that they had been driving from Moretown to Melbourne Hall and had collided upon the way with a hay-cart, whose driver, as the drivers of hay-carts so frequently will, had been taking his siesta during the heat of the day. Thrown from the box into the gutter, the coachman dislocated his shoulder and had many bruises to show; while his horse, terrified at the absence of control, instantly bolted in one of those blind panics which may overtake even the most docile of animals.

Such a story Felix Horowitz had told, but more he could not tell. Evelyn's anxious question as to the purport of Count Odin's visit remained unanswered. It was possible, the youth said, that the Count drove out to see Lord Melbourne.

"But I should not be surprised," he added naïvely, "if there were a better reason which you must not expect me to confess."

She was afraid to press the point, nor dare she, at present, invite the confidence of one who was so great a stranger to her. Sooner or later it would be necessary to abase herself before this man who had thrust himself unluckily into her life and made such quick use of his advantages. Evelyn perceived immediately that she must go to Count Odin and say, "My father does not know that I am Etta Romney. Please do not tell him." And this was far from being the whole penalty of the accident. A glimmer of the truth could come to her already as a spectre which henceforth must haunt her life. She knew that her father had spent some years in Roumania, and that nothing would induce him to revisit that country wherein he had married Dora d'Istran. In the same breath, she told herself that this man was a Roumanian and acquainted with her father's story.

Had she been entirely honest with herself she would have gone on to admit a certain fascination in the mystery which she could neither account for nor take arms against. Count Odin was like no other man she had known. She had tried to deceive herself in London with the imagined belief that she never wished to see him again. Many times, however, since she had returned to Derbyshire this very desire would assert itself. She found herself, against her will and reason, covertly hoping that she might hear his story from his own lips. A psychologist would have held that

there was a certain affinity between the two, and that she had become the victim of it unconsciously. Her fear was of a splendid fascination she had become aware of and could not resist. She imagined that she would obey this man if he commanded her, despite her resolute will and almost eccentric originality. And this she feared even more than her own secret.

It is to be imagined how the suspense of Count Odin's illness tried nerves as high strung as those of Evelyn, and with what expectation she awaited the hour when he would recover consciousness. Her desire had become that of knowing the worst as speedily as might be; and the worst she certainly would not know until consciousness returned and some good excuse might admit her to the sick man's room. Hourly, almost, she asked the news of Dr. Philips and received the strictly professional answer:

"An ordinary case—no cause for worry at all —don't think about it."

To the Doctor's inquiry what she knew of Count Odin she merely said that she had heard of him in London and believed that his father had been the Earl's friend many years ago. This did not in any way disguise her unrest, and the Doctor would have been more than human had he not put his own construction upon it.

"Head over ears in love with him," he told the Vicar that night; "why, sir, she would not deceive a blind man. She's met this fellow in London and bagged him like a wounded pheasant. I shouldn't wonder if it hadn't been all arranged between

them—bolting horse and all. There he is, in the chaplain's room, rambling away in a tongue a Hottentot would be ashamed of, and she's waiting for me always on the stairs just ready to hug me for a good word. What do you make of it? You've married a few and ought to be an expert."

The Vicar shook his head at the compliment and declared that it would never suit the Earl.

"He hopes that she will never marry," he said; "he has told me so himself more than once. If she does marry, he has great ambitions. After all, she may only be naturally anxious. I dare say she's asking herself whether her own car did not do some of the mischief."

The Vicar's wife, on her part, declared the situation to be exceedingly distressing.

"There's no other lady in the house," she said aghast. "I think the Earl should be advised to return. It is so very unusual."

As a matter of fact, the Earl came home on the evening of the third day, exactly one hour after Evelyn had been sent for to see Count Odin for the first time since the tragedy. The meeting took place at the Count's request, as it has been said. Returning consciousness brought with it a full remembrance of the circumstances of the accident and a desire to thank his hostess for that which had been done. So Evelyn went to him, determined to throw herself upon his pity. No other possible course lay before her.

Dr. Philips was in the room when she entered it; but his belief that this was an *affaire de cœur* remained obdurate, and he withdrew into an al-

cove, when the first introductions were over, and made a great business there of discussing the patient's condition with the nurse who had come over from Derby. Thus Evelyn found her opportunity to speak freely to the young Count. Each felt, however, that the need of words between them was small.

"My dear lady," he began, "how shall I apologize for what has happened to me? Three days in your house and not a word of regret that I intrude upon you. Ah, that clownish fellow of a coachman and the other who was asleep upon the imperial. Well, I shall long remember your English horses, and, dear lady, I am not ungrateful to them."

He held out his hand and Evelyn could not withhold her own, which he clasped with warm fingers as though to draw her nearer still toward him.

"It is impossible to speak of gratitude under such circumstances," she said in a low voice. "My father will approve of all that has been done, Count. He is returning to-night from London."

She paused and looked round the room, anxious that Dr. Philips should not hear her. The Count, in his turn, smiled a little maliciously as though fully aware of her thoughts.

"Forgive me," he said again. "I came to see your father, but I did not know that he was the Earl of Melbourne. Will you not sit down, dear lady? You make me unhappy while you stand."

He touched her hand again and indicated a low chair facing his bed. Evelyn, whose heart beat quickly, sat without protest. The minutes were brief; she had so much to tell him.

"You knew my father in Roumania, did you not?" she asked in a tone that could not hide her curiosity. The Count answered her with a kindly smile.

"He was my father's friend," he exclaimed, raising himself a little upon the pillow; "that would be more than twenty years ago. So much has happened since then, Lady Evelyn. Twenty years in a man's life and a woman's—ah, if we could recall even a few of them——"

"Even the weeks," she said meaningly, "when we were not ourselves, but another whom we wish to forget. Our friends can help us to recall those weeks, Count."

Evelyn had not understood the difficulty of confession until this moment. Her visit to London had been so entirely of her own planning, she had locked the dreams of her life so surely in the secret chambers of her heart, that this man was the first human being with whom she had shared so much as a single word of them. Secret actions and secret thoughts alike shame us when we speak of them aloud. Nothing but a dire dread of discovery would have induced her to face the humiliations of this avowal had it not been that silence must have meant discovery and discovery might mean disaster beyond any she could imagine. Count Odin, a trained man of the world, had perception sufficient to read her story instantly and to understand its full significance. Here was a woman who put herself into his power without a single thought of the consequences. He rejoiced beyond words at the circumstance, but had the wit

to conceal his pleasure when he replied with an apparent generosity which earned her gratitude:

"Those are the weeks when our friends should be blind, Lady Evelyn. I am glad that you tell me this. Frankly, I, too, am an artist, and can understand your father's objection to the theatre. Let us forget that the most charming Etta Romney has existed. She came from nowhere and has gone away as she came. We shall be so ungallant that we go to forget her name and the theatre and all her cleverness. Please to speak no more of it. I am your servant, and my memory is at your command. If we have met in London, so shall it be. If we are strangers when your father is come back, that also I will be ready to remember. Command my silence or my words as you think for the best."

He accompanied the words with a gesture which would have made light of the whole affair—as though to say, "This is a little thing, let us speak of something more important. The act, however, did not deceive Evelyn. Her former distrust of this man returned with new force. She felt instinctively that she must pay a price for his silence; though she knew not, nor could she imagine, what that price must be. And, more than this, she rebelled already against the penalties of deception. The net in whose meshes her daring had caught her was a net of equivocation which must degrade while it endured.

"It is for my father's sake," she said quietly, believing it at the moment really to be so. "He knows little of the theatre and dislikes it in con-

sequence. Of course, Count, I had no intention of remaining in London. If you have any love for the stage yourself, you will understand why I went."

"No one so sympathetically, dear lady. You were born an artiste; you will die one, though you never again shall go upon the stage. Here is our friend, Dr. Philips, coming with the medicine to make us happy. Is it that we have met in London or are we to be strangers? Speak and I obey you, now and always."

"There is no necessity to say anything about it," she exclaimed, flushing as she stood up. "I do not suppose my father will ask the question. Your visit to Derbyshire was in his interests, I understand, Count."

He turned a swift keen glance upon her—far from a pleasant glance.

"I came to ask a question of him, lady. I came that he shall tell me whether my own father is a free man or a prisoner. He will not answer that question willingly. But until it is answered, I remain the guest of your house. Silence, if you please. This also is my secret and to-day is not the time to speak of it."

He raised a hand warningly and Evelyn turned about to find Dr. Philips at her side. The little man seemed more amused than ever. His idea that this was a lover's meeting, brought about by the laborious device of a bolting horse and a smashed carriage, could not be put aside.

"Doing capitally, I perceive," he remarked in that professional tone of voice which no human

ill, whatever it may be, appears able to modulate or alter. "Out in a bath-chair to-morrow and steeplechasing the next day. Well, well, if we could only put youth into our bottles, what magicians we should be! Now, sir, if I had been in the carriage, the Lady Evelyn, here, would have been asking herself what she would wear at the funeral to-morrow. But I am an old man and you are a young one, and there is nothing like youth in all the world."

"A most excellent sentiment," said the Count, "and one I take to mean that I may return to London before the end of the week if the Lady Evelyn will graciously permit me to go."

Dr. Philips looked at both of them and smiled.

"You must speak to the Earl about that," he exclaimed. "Why, there is his carriage. I must go and break the news to him."

CHAPTER XIII

THE INTERVIEW

Premonition is an odd thing enough and no distant relative of that sister art of prophecy which the ancients so justly esteemed. Evelyn knew no reason whatever why her father should be offended by the presence of Count Odin at the Manor, but none the less premonition warned her that the meeting would not be unattended by consequences of some import. In this fear she had quitted the Count's room directly Dr. Philips warned her that the Earl's carriage was in the courtyard; and going out to the head of that short flight of stairs by which you reach the banqueting hall, she waited there in no little expectation, afraid she knew not of what, and yet quite sure that she had good reason to be afraid. Down below, in the great hall itself, she heard a sound of voices—for the Doctor had already begun his tale—and she tried to catch the sense of it, listening particularly for any mention of Count Odin's name, which must, she believed, be the key to this strange riddle of her adventure. When her father approached her, smiling and not ill-pleased, she was quite sure that the Count's name had not been mentioned; nor was her surmise in any way incorrect.

The Earl came up the stairs with the air of a man who is glad to get home again and has heard a good jest upon the very threshold of his house. He wore a dark tweed suit and his bronzed face, if slightly drawn by the fatigues of travel, wore, none the less, that benevolent air of content which invariably attended the assurance that all was well at Melbourne Hall. Stooping to kiss Evelyn, he told her in a word that he was aware of the adventure and found it amusing enough.

"Yes, the Doctor has told me," he began; "a man and a horse and a flying machine! My dear girl, you must be careful. What will the county say if we go on like this—the second spill in a couple of months. Why, I'll have to endow an hospital for your victims! Evelyn, my dear——"

She interrupted him almost hotly.

"Doctor Philips should write books," she said quickly. "We had nothing whatever to do with it. The horse bolted from Moretown and raced up behind us. I turned into a field and saved the car. What nonsense to say that it was our fault! Ask the Count's friend how it happened. He has been to London, but he will return to-morrow. He can tell you all about it, father. I was too frightened at the time to know exactly what did happen."

The Earl, still believing that the Doctor's incoherent jargon must have some truth in it, paused, nevertheless, at the word "Count."

"Is the man a foreigner?" he asked quickly.

"He will tell you for himself," she replied evasively. "We have given him the Chaplain's

Room. Please go there and ask him how it was. Dr. Philips has been romancing as usual."

The Doctor came up to them while they spoke and looked foolish enough at overhearing her words. He certainly was a poor hand at a narrative, and his incoherent account of the tragedy had left the Earl with no other idea than that of Evelyn's recklessness and the consequences which had attended it.

"It's just like me," he exclaimed meekly, "always putting my foot in it somewhere. And a great big flat foot too, my dear. What did I tell him now? I said you were returning from Derby and the horse bolted and your car ran into a field. That's it, wasn't it now? Dear me, how very foolish!"

Evelyn did not hear him. They had strolled together down the corridor and witnessed the Earl enter the sick man's room, and now a sharp sound of voices almost in anger came up to them. On his part, Dr. Philips remained convinced that the Count had come into Derbyshire to see Evelyn and that the Earl had some knowledge of the circumstances. Evelyn's abstracted manner seemed to bear him out in this ridiculous idea. Pale and silent and agitated, she waited for the result of that momentous interview. What had the two men to say to each other? How much she would have given to be able to answer that question!

"Your father knows something of the Count, I think?" the Doctor ventured at a hazard while they waited.

She answered that she was unaware of the circumstance.

"I have only seen this man twice in my life," she exclaimed with growing impatience. "If you are writing his biography, Doctor, I really am worse than useless."

He looked at her amazed. "This man." Surely there was nothing romantic about that.

"Writing his biography. My dear Lady Evelyn, what an idea! I quite thought he was an old friend of yours. But everyone we know is an old friend of ours nowadays," he said somewhat solemnly, as though grieved that his anticipations should thus be disappointed. "I know absolutely nothing of the Count," he went on, "except that he is a Roumanian, a country, I believe, in the south-east of Europe, with Bukharest for its capital. I remember that from my schooldays. The Roumanians shoot the Bulgarians on half-holidays, and the Bulgarians burn the Roumanians alive after they have been to church on Sundays. Evidently a country to which one should send their relatives—the elderly ones who have made their wills satisfactorily."

Evelyn was too kind to embarrass him by the declaration that her mother had been a daughter of the country he esteemed so lightly. His readiness to apologize upon every occasion was typical of a kindly man who believed that all the world was ready to find fault with him. His livelihood depended upon his recognition of the fact that illness itself is sometimes little better than a vanity—and that when an obstinate man tells you

that he is an invalid, his pride is hurt if you tell him that he is not.

"My father spent many years in Roumania when he was a young man," Evelyn said, in answer to the Doctor's tirade. "Those are years he does not often speak of. I can't tell you why, Doctor, but he dislikes anyone even to remind him that he was once an *attaché* at Bukharest. Perhaps he will not welcome Count Odin here. I imagine it may be so."

"I'm quite certain of it," said the Doctor with a dry smile. "People who are glad to see each other do not talk like that—of course we must not listen," he added, drawing her away toward the Long Gallery; "we are not supposed to be present at all."

A sound of voices raised almost as though in anger warned him that this was no common affair. Every doctor is curious, and Dr. Philips had no merits above the common in this respect. He knew that he would narrate the whole circumstance to the Vicar later on in the evening, and that two wise heads would be shaken together over this amazing discovery. For the moment he watched Evelyn narrowly and, perceiving her agitation, found himself asking how much of her story was true. Had she, indeed, met this intruder but once in London; and was she in ignorance of the Earl's past, so far as Roumania had written it? He doubted the possibility—it seemed to him prudent, however, not to remain longer at the Hall.

"I shall run over in the morning," he said

blandly; "you can tell me anything I ought to know then. There is nothing much the matter with the man, and a bump may have knocked some good sense into his head. Don't allow him to worry the Earl—I don't want another patient in the house, and your father has not looked very well lately. Send for me again if you have any trouble, and I'll be back as soon as the messenger."

He would much have liked to stop, but that, he realized, was out of the question. Here was some private page from the life-story of a man whose actions had ever mystified both his friends and neighbors. An old woman in his love of a scandal, Dr. Philips had the Earl's displeasure to set in the other pan of the social balance; and that was something not to be lightly weighed. Taking leave of Evelyn at the western door of the Long Gallery, he left her with many protestations of his interest, and the repeated assurance that his morning visit should be an early one.

"I'll look in first thing," he exclaimed; "don't let that man worry the Earl, my dear. There's a hang-dog look about him I never liked. Keep your eyes on him—and take my advice, the advice of an old friend—get rid of him."

Anxious as she was, she could not but smile at this *volteface*. An hour ago, believing that Count Odin had come to Melbourne because he was her lover, the Doctor was ready to declare him a very Adonis, a prodigy of charm and valor and all the graces. Now he had become "that man," a term human nature is ready enough to apply to stran-

gers. Evelyn, left alone in the gallery, fell to wondering which was the truer estimate. Why, she asked, had she any interest in this stranger at all? Did the appeal he made to her speak to Etta Romney or to Evelyn, my lord of Melbourne's daughter? Was there not a subtle idea that this man could speak for the glamour and the stir of that world she craved for and was denied. Even at this early stage, she did not believe that the influence was for good, though she forbore to name it as utterly evil. Agitation, indeed, and a curiosity more potent than any she had ever submitted to, now dominated her to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Why did her father delay? Of what sometime forgotten day of the dead years were the two men now speaking in a tone which declared their anger? She could not even hazard an answer. The gong for dressing sounded and still the Earl did not leave the Count's room. Dinner was served—he did not appear at the table. Greatly distressed and afraid, Evelyn waited until nine o'clock, when a message came down to tell her that he had gone to his room and would dine alone.

"I must go up, Griggs," she said firmly; "my father cannot be well."

"My lady," he said, "the Earl was firm on that. He will see no one, not even you to-night."

The intimation astounded her, and yet had been expected. Destiny spoke to her plainly since the day the Count had come to Melbourne Hall. For what else had it been but Destiny which brought her face to face with this man in London, sent her

almost into his arms and revealed her name to him? But for that chance encounter, her secret might have remained her own to the end. She did not fear her secret now, but a great mystery, the story of her father's life (she knew not what it might be), told abroad to the world, to his shame and her own. Not in vain had she lived these years of a close intimacy with one who could not so much as bear the word "youth" mentioned in his presence. There had been a past in the Earl's life, of that she was convinced—and this man, she said, had come to the Manor to accuse him. It remained for her to take up arms against him—she, my Lady Evelyn, the recluse, the captive of a selfish idea.

And that was in her mind already—the personal issue between herself and the Count. She would not shrink from it, although she realized its perils.

"Not Evelyn, but Etta," she said, "yes, yes, and that is Destiny also. And now the world is all before me and I am alone."

Alone! Truly so, for my Lady Evelyn knew not one in all the world to whom she might speak in that hour of awakening.

CHAPTER XIV

INHERITANCE

Alone in his own room, high up in the northern tower of Melbourne Hall, the Earl locked the door and turned up the lights with the air of a man who has a considerable task before him and must make the most of the hours of grace remaining.

He was very pale and greatly changed since he had returned from London three hours ago. Some would have perceived in his manner, not the evidences of fear but of displeasure, and such displeasure as events bordering upon tragedy alone could provoke. Uttering but one harsh instruction to the servant who answered his bell, he sat at his writing table and for a full hour turned over the pages of a diary which had not seen the light for twenty years or more.

Georges Odin! How the very name could seize upon his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Sitting there with the time-stained papers before him, the Earl was no longer in Derbyshire but out upon the Carpathians, a youth of the West craving for the excitements of the East; a hunter upon a brave horse, the friend of brigands and of outlaws—drinking deep of the intoxicating draughts of freedom and debauch. Well and truly had this young Count, whom Fate

had sent to his door, reminded him of these scenes he had made it his life's purpose to forget.

"Zallony, my lord," he had said, "Zallony still lives and you were one of Zallony's band. They tell of your crimes to this day. The mad Englishman who carried the village girls to the hills—the mad Englishman who drank when no other could lift the cup—the mad Englishman who rode out of Bukharest in a bandit's cloak and lived the Bohemian days of which the very gypsies were ashamed. Shall I tell you his name? It would be that of my father's murderer."

And the answer had been a cringing evasion.

"I met Georges Odin in fair fight. He was the better man. I could show the scars his sword left to this day. Of what do you accuse me? They sent him to prison—well, I did not make their laws. He died there, a convict laborer in the salt mines. Was it my doing? Ask those at the Ministry. We moved heaven and earth to save him. The Government's reason was a political one. They sent your father to the mines because the Russian Government—then all powerful at Bukharest—believed him to be its most dangerous enemy. His affair with me was the excuse. What had I to do with it?"

But the Count persisted.

"Your influence would have saved him. You preferred to keep silent, my lord. And I will tell you more. It was at your instigation that the Roumanian Government arrested my father in the first place. You wished for revenge—I think it was more than that. You were afraid that the

woman you married would find you out if Georges Odin regained his liberty. You were not sure that Dora d'Istran did not love him. And so—you left Roumania and took her with you—luckily for you both—to die before she had read her own heart truly. That's what I have come this long way to tell you. To Robert Forrester—I said. How should I know that in England they would make a lord of such a man! I did not know it; but that to me is the same. You shall answer my question or pay the price. My lord, I have brains of my own and I can use them. You shall pay me what you owe—you will be wise to do so."

The Earl did not wince at the threat, nor did his habitual self-control desert him. His insight would have been shallow indeed if he had not perceived that he was face to face with a dangerous enemy, and one with whom he might not trifle.

"Put your question to me and I will answer it," he said doggedly. "Remember that we are not in Roumania, Count. A word from me and my men would set you where questions would help you little. Speak freely while I have the patience to hear you."

"As freely as you could desire, my lord. A wise man would not utter a threat at such a time. Do you think that I, Georges Odin's son, do you think that I come to England alone? Ah, my lord, how little you know me! Open one of your windows and listen for the message my friends will deliver to you. I come to you with white gloves upon my hands. It is to ask you, my lord, in what prison my poor father is lying at this moment.

Tell me that, help me to open the gates for him, and we are friends. It will be time to utter threats when you refuse."

The Earl's face blanched at the words, but he did not immediately reply to them. The story which the young man told was too astonishing that he should easily understand it.

"You father died in the fortress of Krajova," he said at length. "I remember that it was in the month of November in the year 1874. Why do you speak of the gates of his prison? It is incredible that you should bring such a story to me."

"As little incredible as your own ignorance, my lord. I thought as you did until the day, five years ago, which released Zallony's brother from Krajova. He brought the news to us. My father lives. But he is at Krajova no longer. The Russian Government never forgets, my lord. It remembers the day when Georges Odin was its enemy. My own people fear that my father's liberty would awaken old affairs that had better sleep. He is the victim of them. Yours is the one hand in all Europe that could set him free. My lord, the world must know his story and you shall write it. And if not you—then my Lady Evelyn, your daughter. Do you think I am so blind that I do not read the truth? The blood that ran in the mother's veins runs in the daughter's. Open the doors of this house to her and she will go to the hills as her mother went. The desire of life throbs in her veins. When I speak to her, I witness the struggle between the old and the

new; faith and joy; the convent and the theatre; love and the prison. Your pride, your fear, have made a captive of her—but I, my lord, may yet cut her pretty bonds. As God is in heaven, I will not spare her one hour of shame if you do not give my father back to me. Think of that before you answer me. The girl or the man. Your shame or her freedom. My lord, you have not many hours in which to choose."

Such an alternative the Earl carried with him to his own room; such an alternative spoke to him from every page of the diaries his hand turned so painfully. It was as though the dead had risen to accuse him. Yonder, in a great clamped drawer of the bureau, were the letters he had received from his dead wife in the days when he contended with Georges Odin for the love of that mad, wild girl of the Carpathians. How ardently he had loved her! What mad hours they had lived amid the gypsy children of Roumania! And yet in heart and will she was another's. He had long known she loved the prisoner at Krajova. And the one supremely cowardly thing he had done in the course of his life had been done at the dictation of an uncontrollable passion which would sacrifice even honor for her sake. Georges Odin, the Count's father, had met him in fair fight —the better swordsman had won. Never would he forget the day—the snow-capped hills, the white glen in which they fought; the keen sword lightly engaging his own; then the swift attack, the masterly *reposte* and that sensation as of red-hot iron passing to his very heart. No shame here,

it is true; but there were days of shame afterward when the story came out and King Charles himself asked the question, was it so? A word from Robert Forrester would have saved his enemy from the mines. He never spoke it. The man disappeared from his ken, and he believed that he was dead. He could scarcely deny the justice of the retribution which now overtook him.

Georges Odin alive and a prisoner still in some unknown fortress citadel. How the very name could awaken forgotten sensations! It seemed to the Earl as though the madness of his youth struggled once more for mastery with the finer impulses and desires which a later day had inspired. Yesterday he had been a country gentleman, seeking to cast behind finally that cloak of unconventionality he had worn with such pleasure in his youth. He had meant to whitewash the sepulchre; to take his seat in the Lords; to equip himself for the great honors thrust upon him; to marry Evelyn sedately to a son of a noble house and then, as it were, to convince himself that the abnormal had been purged out of him and would afflict him no more. These ambitions, however, were powerless now to combat the more natural instincts which the story of his youth could recreate for him. Once more in imagination he rode the hills of Roumania as a free adventurer, submitting to the laws neither of God nor of man. Once more the sensuous voluptuousness of the Earl dominated him, and the spirit within him rebelled at its captivity. He must escape convention, he thought, become a wanderer

once more. And Evelyn! Had he not feared to read in her acts this very inheritance his own nature cried out for. He shuddered when he thought of Evelyn. Who would save her in the hour of cataclysm?

Such were the thoughts of that night long drawn and terrible. In moments of revulsion against those who had thus brought him to bay, there were mad whisperings which reminded him that Georges Odin's son was the prisoner of his house and that, as he would, he might readily be detained there until some understanding had been come to. This was a thought the Earl could recall again and again. The man was alone and helpless in his hands. It would be folly to open the doors and to say, "Go out and tell the story to the world." Melbourne Hall had harbored greater secrets before that day, and might witness them again. Why should he stand irresolute; what forbade him to save Evelyn from all that revelation must mean to her? He knew not—it remained for the house to answer him, silently and finally, with the answer of one who has set out upon no idle mission but is well aware of the danger he must face.

This was at the hour of dawn. Unable to sleep, the Earl sat by his open window watching the chill gray light creeping over the dew-laden grass and disclosing the trees one by one as though an unseen hand drew back the curtain of the night from the stately branches. A thrush with a sweet note heralded the day—the deer began to browse beneath the great avenue of yews. Anon, a sweet fresh air, invigorating as a very draught of life

itself, came down from the hills and sent the ripples leaping and splashing beneath the arches of the old bridge, as though the river also had awakened from a lover's dreams. And now all stood revealed as in a picture of a forest land; the vast spaces of ripe green grass, delicious vistas of wood and thicket; home scenes, and scenes of Nature untrammelled. Upon other days, often at such an hour as this, the Earl had looked down upon them and said, "Mine—mine . . . all these are mine." To-day he viewed them with heavy eyes. Something unfamiliar in the landscape attracted his attention and roused him from his musings.

A loom of heavy white smoke floating upward from the glen! Nothing but that. A drift of smoke and anon the figure of a man seen between the trees! Another would hardly have remarked the circumstances, but Robert Forrester became awake in an instant and as vigilant as one who dreads that which his eyes discover.

"They are gypsies, by——" he said, "and they have come at this man's bidding."

He knew the meaning of their presence without words to tell him. They had come to demand the freedom of their old master, Georges Odin, whose son had carried them across the seas with him.

"I must answer them," the Earl said, "and if I answer them, what then? Will the other be silent?"

He turned away and shut the window violently, as though to shut the spectre out.

"He would kill me," he said; "the world is not big enough to hide me from Georges Odin."

CHAPTER XV

THE PRICE OF SALVATION

Evelyn met her father at the breakfast table on the following morning; but their brief conversation in no way enlightened her. The Earl, indeed, appeared to be entirely wrapped up in his own thoughts, and the few questions he put to her were far from being helpful.

"You have seen my friend, Count Odin," he remarked abruptly, "what is your opinion of him?"

"He interests me, but I do not like him," she replied as frankly.

"A first impression," the Earl continued with a note of annoyance but ill-concealed. "You will get to know him better. His father was my oldest friend."

"In which case the son is sometimes an embarrassment," she said naturally, and with no idea of the meaning of her words.

The Earl looked up quickly.

"Has he told you anything," he asked with little cleverness, "spoken of Bukharest, perhaps? You must have been a good deal together while I was away. What did he say to you? A man like that is never one to hold his tongue."

She smiled at the suggestion.

"He was unconscious for thirty hours. My store of small talk did not come up to that. Why do you ask me, father? Don't you wish me to talk to him?"

"My dear child, I wish you to like him if you can. His father was my friend. We must show him hospitality just for his father's sake."

"Oh, I'll take him in the park and flirt with him if you wish it. The nuns did not teach me how—I suppose flirtation was an extra."

Again he looked at her closely. This flippancy veiled some humor he could not fathom. Was it possible that the girl had been fascinated already by a man well schooled in the arts of pleasing women. And what solution of his trouble would that be? If he gave Evelyn to the son of Georges Odin—a coward's temptation from which he shrank immediately, but not so far away that he put the thought entirely from him.

"I mean nothing so foolish," he exclaimed sharply; "the Count is our guest and must be treated as such. I understand that he is allowed to go out to-day. If you have any wish to accompany him in the car, he will consider it a courtesy."

"Thank you," she said in a hard voice; "I should really be frightened of the Vicar's wife."

Her raillery closed the conversation. The Earl went upstairs to his guest. Evelyn, at a later hour, caught up a straw hat and ran off by herself to the little boat-house by the river. She was a skilful canoeist and there was just water enough for the dainty canoe her father had bought in

Canada for her. Never was she so much alone as when lying, book in hand, beneath the shelter of some umbrageous willow; and to-day she welcomed solitude as she had never welcomed it since first they came to Melbourne Hall. One refuge there was above others—Di Vernon's Arbor, they called it, where the willows spread their trailing branches upon the very waters; where the banks were so many couches of verdant grass, the iris generous in its abundant beauty, the river but a pool of the deepest, most entrancing blue water—this refuge she had named the Lake of Dreams, and to this to-day she steered her frail craft, and there found that solitude she prized so greatly.

What did her father mean by wishing her to be gracious to Count Odin? Had he so changed in a night that he would sacrifice his only daughter to atone for some wrong committed in his own boyhood? Her passionate nature could resent the mere idea as one too shameful to contemplate. But what did it mean then, and how would she stand if the Count presumed upon her father's acquiescence? The fascination which this stranger exercised did not deceive her; she knew it for the spell of evil, to be resisted with all her heart and soul. Was she strong enough, had she character enough, to resist it? She would be alone against them both if the worst befell, she remembered, and would fight her battle unaided. Others might have been dismayed, but not Evelyn, the daughter of Dora d'Istran. She was grateful perhaps that her father had declared his preference so openly. A veiled hostility toward their guest might have

provoked her to show him civilities which were asked of her no longer. As it was, she understood her position and could prepare for it.

To this point her reverie had carried her when she became aware that she was no longer alone. A rustling of leaves, a twig snapping upon the bank, brought her instantly to a recognition of the fact that some one watched her hiding-place behind the willows of the pool. Whoever the intruder might be, he withdrew when she looked up, and his face remained undiscovered. Evelyn resented this intrusion greatly, and was about to move away when some one, hidden by the trees, began to play a zither very sweetly, and to this the music of a guitar and a fiddle were added presently, and then the pleasing notes of a human voice. Pushing her canoe out into the stream, Evelyn could just espy a red scarf flashing between the trees and, from time to time, the dark face of a true son of Egypt. Who these men were or why they thus defied her privacy, she could not so much as hazard; nor did she any longer resent their temerity. The weird, wild music made a strange appeal to her. It awakened impulses and ideas she had striven to subdue; inspired her imagination to old ideals—excited and troubled her as no music she had heard before. The same mad courage which sent her to London to play upon the stage of a theatre returned to her and filled her with an inexplicable ecstasy. She had all the desire to trample down the conventions which stifled her liberty and to let the world think as it would. Etta Romney came back to life and being

in that moment—Etta speaking to Evelyn and saying, "This is a message of the joy of life, listen, for it is the voice of Destiny."

The music ceased upon a weird chord in a minor key; and, when it had died away, Evelyn became aware that the men were talking in a strange tongue and secretly, and that they still had no intention of declaring their presence. With the passing of the spell of sweet sounds, she found herself not without a little alarmed curiosity to learn who they were and by whom they had been permitted to wander abroad in the park, apparently unquestioned and unknown. Disquiet, indeed, would have sent her to the house again, but for the appearance of no other than Count Odin himself, who came without warning to the water's edge and laughed at her evident perplexity.

"My fellows annoy you, dear lady," he said. "Pray let me make the excuses for them. You do not like their music—is it not so?"

"Not at all, I like it very much," she said, not weighing her words. "It is the maddest music I ever heard in all my life."

"Then come and tell young Zallony so. I brought him to England, Lady Evelyn. I mean to make his fortune. Come and see him and tell him if London will not like him when he scrapes the fiddle in a lady's ear. It would be gracious of you to do that—these poor fellows would die if you English ladies did not clap the hands for them. Come and be good to young Zallony and he will never forget."

He helped her ashore with his left hand, for his

right he carried in a silken scarf, the last remaining witness to his accident. His dress was a well-fitting suit of gray flannels, with a faint blue stripe upon them. He had the air and manner of a man who denied himself no luxury and was perfectly well aware of the fascination he exercised upon the majority of women he met, whatever their nationality. Had Evelyn been questioned she would have said that his eyes were the best gift with which Nature had dowered him. Of the darkest gray, soft and languishing in a common way, they could, when passion dominated them, look into the very soul of the chosen victim and leave it almost helpless before their steadfast gaze. To this a soldier's carriage was to be added; the grand air of a man born in the East and accustomed to be obeyed.

"This is Zallony," he said with a tinge of pride in his voice, "also the son of a man with whom your father was very well acquainted in his younger days. Command him and he will fiddle for you. There are a hundred ladies in Bukharest who are, at all times, ready to die for him. He comes to England and spares their lives. Admit his generosity, dear lady. He will be very kind to you for my sake."

Zallony was a Romany of Romanies: a tall, dark-eyed gypsy, slim and graceful, and a musician in every thought and act of his life. He wore a dark suit of serge, a broad-brimmed hat, and a bright blue scarf about his waist. With him were three others; one a very old man dressed in a bizarre fashion of the East, and at no pains to

adapt it to the conventions of the West; the rest, dark-visaged, far from amiable-looking fellows, who might never have smiled in all their lives. Zallony remained a prince among them. He bowed low to Evelyn and instantly struck up a lively air, which the others took up with that verve and spirit so characteristic of Eastern musicians. When they had finished, Evelyn found herself thanking them warmly. They had no English, and could only answer her with repeated smiles.

"How did these people come here?" she asked the Count, as they began to walk slowly toward the woods.

His reply found him once more telling the truth and astounded, perhaps, at the ease of a strange employment.

"By the railway and the sea, Lady Evelyn. They are my watch-dogs—you would call them that in England. Oh, yes, I am a timid traveller. I like to hear these fellows barking in the woods. So much they love me that if I were in prison they would pull down the walls to get me out. Your father, my lord, does not forbid them to pitch their tents in his park. Why should he? I am his guest and shall be a long time in this country, perhaps. These fellows are not accustomed to live in houses. Dig them a cave and they will make themselves happy—they are sons of tents and the hills; men who know how to live and how to die. The story of Roumania has written the name of Zallony's father in golden letters. He fought for our country against the Russians who would have stolen our liberty from us. To

this day the Ministry at Petersburg would hang his son if he was so very foolish as to visit that unfortunate country. Truly, Zallony has many who love him not—he is fortunate, Lady Evelyn, that your father is not among the number."

He meant her to ask him a question and she did not flinch from it.

"Why should my father have any opinions upon the matter? Are these people known to him also?"

"My dear lady, in Roumania, twenty years ago, the bravest men, the biggest hearts, were at Zallony's command. His regiment of hussars was the finest that the world has ever seen. Bukharest made it a fashion to send young men secretly to its ranks. The name of Zallony stood for a brotherhood of men, not soldiers only, but those sworn to fidelity upon the Cross; to serve each other faithfully, to hold all things in common—the poor devils, how little they had to hold!—such were Zallony's hussars. Lady, your father and my father served together in the ranks; they took a common oath—they rode the hills, lived wild nights on desolate mountains, shared good fortune and ill, until an unlucky day when a woman came between them and brotherhood was no more. I was such a little fellow then that I could not lift the sword they put into my hands; but they filled my body up with wine and I rode my pony after them, many a day that shall never be forgotten. This is to tell you that my mother, a little wild girl of the Carpathians, died the year I was born. Her I do not remember—a thing to be regretted, for

who may say what a mother's memory may not do for that man who will let it be his guiding star. I did not know her, Lady Evelyn. When they carried my father to prison, the priests took charge of me and filled my head with their stories of peace and good-will—the head of one who had ridden with Zallony on the hills and heard the call to arms as soon as he could hear anything at all. They told me that my father was dead—five years ago I learned that he lived. Lady Evelyn, he is a prisoner, and I have come to England to give him liberty."

He looked at her, waiting for a second question, nor did she disappoint him.

"Can my father help you to do that, Count?"

"My dear lady, consider his position. An English noble, bearing his honored name; the master of great riches—what cannot he do if he will? Let him say but one word to my Government and the affair is done. I shall see my dear father again—the world will be a new world for me. My lord has but to speak."

"Is it possible that he could hesitate?"

"All things are possible where human folly is concerned."

"Then there would be a reason, Count?"

"And a consequence, Lady Evelyn."

"Oh," she said quickly, "you are not frank with me even now."

"So frank that I speak to you as I never spoke to another in all my life. You are the only person in England who can help me and help your father to do well. I have asked him for the liberty of a

man who never did him a wrong. He has refused to answer me, yes or no. Why should I tell you that delay is dangerous? If I am silent a little while, do you not guess that it is for your sake that I am silent? These things are rarely hidden from clever women. Say that Count Odin has learned to be a lover and you will question me no more."

They were in a lonely glade, dark with the shade of beeches, when he made this apparently honest declaration; and he stood before her forbidding her to advance further or to avoid his entreaty. Her confusion, natural to her womanhood, he interpreted in its true light. "She does not love me, but there is that in her blood which will give me command over her," he said. And this was the precise truth. Evelyn had, from the first, been fully aware of the strange spell this man could put upon her. His presence seemed to her as that of the figure of evil beckoning her to wild pleasures and forbidden gardens of delight. Strong as her will was, this she could not combat. And she shrank from him, helpless, and yet aware of his power.

"You are speaking to me of grave things," she said quietly. "My own feelings must not enter into them. If my father owes this debt to you, he shall pay it. I will be no part of the price, Count Odin."

"*Cara mia,*" he said, taking both her hands and trying to draw her close to him, "I care not how it is if you shall say you love me. Do not hide the truth from yourself. Your father is in

great danger. You can save him from the pen
ties of wrong. Will you refuse to do so becau
I love you—love you as I have never believed
man could love; love you as my father loved yo
mother so many years ago—with the love of
race that has fought for women and died f
them; a race which is deaf when a women sa
no, which follows her, *cara mia,* to the end of t
earth and has eyes for nothing else but the hou
which shelters her? Will you do this when yo
heart can command me as you will—sayin
speak or be silent, forget or remember? I kn
you better; you love me, Evelyn; you are afra
to tell me, but you love me. That is why I rema
a prisoner of this house—because you love m
and I shall make you my wife. Ah, *cara mia,* s
it but once—I love you, Georges, the son of
father's friend—I love you and will not forb
your words."

A strange thrill ran through Evelyn's veins
she listened to this passionate declaration. T
frenzied words of love did not deceive her. Th
man, she thought, would so speak to many
woman in the years to come. A better wit wou
have concealed his purpose and rendered him le
frank. "He would sell his father's liberty at
bidding," she said, and the thought set her stru
gling in his arms, flushed with anger and wi
shame.

"I will not hear you, Count," she cried aga
and again. "I cannot love you—you are not
my people. If my father has done wrong, he sh
repay. He is not so helpless that he cannot sa

"Oh please let me go; your hands hurt me. I can never be your wife, never, never!" Chap. 15.

me from this. Oh, please let me go; your hands hurt me. I can never be your wife, never, never!"

He released her reluctantly, for his quick ear had caught the sound of a horse galloping upon the open grass beyond the thicket.

"You will answer me differently another day," he said smilingly; "meanwhile, *cara mia,* there are two secrets to keep—yours and mine. If the charming Lady Evelyn will not hear me, I must remember Etta Romney, a young lady of my acquaintance—ah, you know her too; and that is well for her. Let us return to the house. My lord will have much to say to me and I to him."

They went up to the Hall together in silence. Evelyn knew how much she was in his power and how idle her veiled threats had been.

She could save her father from this man—truly. But at what a price!

"Etta Romney would marry him," she said bitterly; "but I—Evelyn—God help me to be true to myself!"

CHAPTER XVI

A GAME OF GOLF

Golf at Moretown is " by favor of the Lord of the Manor " played across a corner of the home park, so remote from Melbourne Hall that you have a vista of that fine old house but rarely from the trees, and nowhere at all if you be an ardent player.

Such a description could in all sincerity have been applied to either of our old friends Dr. Philips and the Rev. Harry Fillimore, the vicar of the parish. They played the game as though all their worldly hope depended upon it. The best of friends at common times, difficulty could provoke them to such violent hostilities that they did not speak a word to each other until the after-luncheon glass of port had been slowly sipped. Intimate in their knowledge each of the other, the Vicar knew exactly when to cough that the Doctor's forcible exclamations might not be overheard by the caddies. The Doctor, upon his part, sympathized very cordially with the Vicar when that worthy found himself in a bunker. " Harry, my dear boy, pray remember where you are," he would say, and to give him his due, the Vicar rarely forgot the number of strokes necessary to extract him-

self from one of these many vales of tears which abounded at Moretown.

Other moments, it should be observed, were those of mutual admiration.

"If you could only putt as well as you can drive, you might play Vardon," the Vicar would tell the Doctor.

To which the reply would be:

"My dear Harry, Taylor could not play a better approach than that. You'll be down to scratch if you go on improving in this way."

Needless to say, such enthusiasm demanded complete absorption in the game and tolerated no liberties. If anyone had told the Doctor of the fall of Port Arthur at the moment of his playing an approach, that man assuredly would have deserved any fate that overtook him. When the stove in the vestry set fire to the chancel roof and did five hundred pounds worth of damage to Moretown Church, no one had the courage to tell the Vicar until he had holed out on the eighteenth green. "Words won't put the roof on again," the sexton wisely said, "and a precious lot of words you'll get from 'ee while 'ee's playin' with his ball." So the doleful news was reserved for the Club House. "I really fear I ought not to play a second round," the Vicar exclaimed when he heard it; "most vexing, I must say."

These being the circumstances of the weekly duel *à outrance,* it certainly was astonishing to discover the Vicar and the Doctor talking of any other subject but golf on a day of July some three weeks after Count Odin's arrival at Melbourne

Hall. Strange to say, however, they discussed neither the merits of the cut nor the doubtful wisdom of running up approach; but playing their strokes with some indifference as to the attending consequences, they spoke of my lord of Melbourne and of the turn affairs at the Hall were taking. To be entirely candid, the Vicar left the main part of the talk to the Doctor; for the secret which he carried he had as yet no courage to tell to anyone.

"Most extraordinary—not the same man, sir, by twenty years. If he were a woman, I would call it neurasthenia and back my opinion for a Haskell. What do you think of a sane human being letting a lot of dirty gypsies have the free run of the Hall; in and out like rabbits in a warren—drinking his best wines and riding his horses, and lots more besides that the servants hint at but won't talk about? Why, they tell me that he's up half the night with the scum sometimes, as wild as the rest of them when they fiddle and caper in the Long Gallery. What's common sense to make of it? What do you make of it, leaving common sense out of the matter?"

The Vicar looked somewhat askance at the dubious compliment; nor did it encourage him to tell of the strange sights he had seen in Melbourne Park some twelve hours before this epoch-making encounter.

"I hear the men are Roumanians," he said, taking a brussie from his bag and making an atrocious shot with it. "Of course the Earl—this is miserable—the Earl was in Roumania as a

young man. Perhaps he is returning some courtesy these wild fellows showed to him. You play the odd, I think."

"Odd or the like, I don't care a—that is to say, it is most extraordinary. Why, they're bandits, Harry—bandits, I tell you, and, unless Mrs. Fillimore looks out, they'll carry her off to Matlock Tor and hold her out to ransom—perhaps while we're on the links. A pretty advertisement you'd get if that came off. A Vicar's wife stolen by brigands. The Reverend Gentleman on the Q. Tee. Think of it in the evening papers! How some of them would chaff you!"

The Vicar played an approach shot and said, "This is really deplorable." He would have preferred to talk golf; but the Doctor gave him no rest, and so he said presently:

"I wonder what Lady Evelyn thinks of it all? She went by me in the car yesterday and Bates was driving her. Now, I've never seen that before. . . . God bless me, what a shocking stroke!"

He shook his head as the ball went skimming over the ground into the deepest and most terrible bunker on Moretown Links—the Doctor following it with that sympathetic if hypocritical gaze we turn upon an enemy's misfortunes. Impossible not to better such a miserable exhibition, he thought. Unhappy man, game of delight, the two were playing from the bunker together before a minute had passed!

"You and I would certainly do better at the mangle if this goes on," the Doctor exclaimed

with honest conviction; "the third bunker I've found to-day. A man cannot be well who does that."

"Rheumatism, undoubtedly," the Vicar said slyly.

A boyish laugh greeted the thrust.

"Shall we call it curiosity? Hang the game! What does it matter? You put a bit of india-rubber into a flower-pot and think you are a better man than I am. But you're not. I'd play you any day for the poor-box. Let's talk of something else—Lady Evelyn, for instance."

"Will she marry him, Frederick?"

"Him—the sandy-haired foreigner with the gypsy friends?"

"Is there any other concerned?"

"Oh, don't ask me. Do I keep her pocket-book?"

"I wish you did, my dear fellow. From every point of view, this marriage would be deplorable."

"From every point of view but that of the two people concerned, perhaps. She is a girl with a will of her own—do you think she would marry him if she didn't like him?"

"She might, from spite. There are better reasons, perhaps worse. You told me at their first meeting that you believed her to be in love with him."

"I was an idiot. Let's finish the round. The man will probably live to be hanged—what does it matter?"

"Well, if it doesn't matter to you, it matters to nobody. I'll tell you something queer—a thing

I saw last night. It's been in my head all day. I'll tell you as we go to the next green."

They drove a couple of good balls and set out from the tee with lighter hearts. As they went, the Vicar unburdened himself of that secret which golf alone could have prevented him disclosing an hour ago.

"I told you that I dined with Sir John Hall last night," he said in a low voice; "well, young John drove me home, and, of course, he went through the Park. Poor boy, his case is quite hopeless. He drives his horse to death round and round the house on the off chance of seeing the flash of her gown between the trees. Well, he drove me home and just as we entered the Park, what do you think—why, three or four men passed us at the gallop—soldiers, I say, in white uniforms with gold sashes and gold sword-hilts. I saw them as plainly as I see you now—the Earl was one of them—the young Count another. Now, what do you think of it? Are they mad, or is some great jest being played? I give it up. This sort of thing is beyond my experience—it should be a case for you, Frederick, though if you can make anything of it, I'm a Dutchman."

The Doctor shook his head. He did not doubt the truth of the Vicar's story, but he made believe to doubt it.

"You dined with John Hall, Harry?"

"I have told you so."

"Sixty-three port, I suppose, on the top of champagne?"

"That is mere foolishness, Frederick."

"Admittedly, forgive me—I can be serious and am. Here's an affair which a man might write about in text-books. This grown man puts on a coat he may have worn in his youth and rides like a steeplechaser through the Park. Why does he do it? What's he after? I'll tell you, his lost youth, that's what he's after. Trying to catch up Time and give the fellow the go-by. I've seen that disease in many shapes, but this is a new one. Try to think it out. This young Count comes over from Roumania; he brings these gypsy rascals with him. Their tongue, their dress, their music, speak to the Earl as his youth used to speak to him. He's living for a moment a life he lived thirty years ago. I can see him grasping at the straws of youth every time I go up to the Hall. These midnight carousals are so much midnight madness. The man is saying to Age, you shall not have me. Ten years of respectability go at one fell swoop. He'd sell those he loved best on earth to win back one year of the days which have been. That's my diagnosis. The bacillus, *La Jeunesse!* And that's a bacillus you cannot cure, Harry."

He was in deadly earnest and the Vicar looked grave enough. In his dim way, he understood the Doctor and believed him to be speaking the truth. Lord Melbourne had been an enigma to him from the first; an aristocrat and not an aristocrat; one of the Melbournes and yet an alien; a man whose mask of reservation the keenest eyes could not pierce; a silent man when one asked for that key by which alone the secret chambers of his

mind could be entered. Of such a one any fable might be told and believed. The Vicar understood that he had come face to face with some mystery; but of its witnesses he could make nothing.

"I do believe you are right," he said at length; "there have been tales as strange in the story of the house—generally concerning a lady, I fear At least Evelyn can know nothing of this," he added a little thoughtfully; "it would be a great misfortune for her."

"Heritage has little regard for the fortunes of others," said the Doctor. "I don't suppose she would have married an Englishman—she's not the girl to do it. That comes of educating them abroad—I would sooner send a daughter of mine to fight the Russians than to a school in Paris. Make Englishwomen of them, I say, and leave the fal-de-lals alone. What's it worth to a girl if she can jabber French and has lost her English heart? No, my dear Vicar, England for me and English roses for my home. Evelyn will marry this man because France taught her to think well of foreigners. If she had gone to a Derbyshire school, he might as well have proposed to Cleopatra's monument on the Thames Embankment. I'm sorry for her, truly, but words won't change the thing, and that's the end of it. Let's go and lunch. We have done nothing ill for one morning, any way.

They went to lunch and afterward to the business of a common day. As it fell out, they did not meet again until after church upon the fol-

lowing Sunday, when the Vicar, still wearing his surplice as he crossed from the vestry to the parsonage, found the Doctor waiting for him with the air of one who has important tidings and must impart them quickly.

"No bad news from the Hall?" he exclaimed, so much was that great house now in his mind.

The Doctor, however, drew him aside and told him in a word.

"The Count's gone," he said quickly. "He comes back in October. The Earl told me so himself. She's to marry him in the winter, and that's the end of it, Harry."

The Vicar shook his head gravely.

"The beginning of it, Frederick, the beginning," he said wisely.

BOOK II

THE ENGLISHMAN

CHAPTER XVII

GAVIN ORD BEGINS HIS WORK

In what manner Gavin Ord arrived at Melbourne Hall and took up his residence there has already been recorded in the early pages of this narrative.

He came upon a night in August, three weeks precisely after the departure of Count Odin for Bukharest. Of the people of the Hall he knew little save that which common gossip and the tittle-tattle of the newspapers had taught him; nor was his the temperament to be troubled overmuch by the strange hallucination which had attended his journey from Moretown to the Manor. That which some people would have called an apparition, he attributed to fatigue and the hour of the night; and while an uneasy feeling that this simple account of it might not ultimately satisfy him was not to be lightly dismissed, the hospitalities of the great house and the work to which he had been called there quickly dispelled the impression of it, and left him with some shame that he had been such an easy victim to a vulgar de-

lusion. For the rest, curiosity remained the only intruder between him and the work he had been summoned to do.

The Lady Evelyn! Where had he seen her before? How came it that her face was so familiar to him?

Every hour that he lived at the Hall quickened this impression of familiarity. Her very voice could make him start, as though one whom he knew well were speaking to him. Her stately movements, her gestures, tormented his memory as though inciting it to recall forgotten scenes for him. At the luncheon table, upon the second day, he made bold to tell her of his immovable idea.

"We have met somewhere, Lady Evelyn," he said, "I cannot tell where; but it was in some such house as this—in the gardens of such a house. And that is odd, for to my knowledge I was never in a Tudor house before. Now, say that I am dreaming it; that it is just one of those foolish ideas which come to one in sleep and are remembered when waking. It could hardly be anything else, of course."

Evelyn flushed crimson while he was speaking; but she retained her composure sufficiently to declare that she had no recollection of such an occasion.

"We rarely go from here," she said evasively. "I cannot recollect visiting any Tudor house in England—you see so many, Mr. Ord. It would be natural to have such an idea, I think."

"Oh, perfectly and perhaps foolish. Our brains play us strange tricks, and, often enough,

the wildest of them have the least meaning. I know a man in Paris who dreamed three nights running that he would be thrown out of a motor-car on his way to Monte Carlo. He put off the visit in consequence and was knocked down next day by a cab in the Rue Quatre Septembre. I don't mean to say that he was killed, but he had a nasty fall, and that was the price he paid for dreaming. I try to dismiss these things as soon as they come to me. Here's a case in point. You and I clearly have never met—unless it were in London," he added, with another keen glance at her.

Evelyn could not suppress the high color in her cheeks, and they were crimson when she found her father's eyes watching her curiously as though some train of thought had been set in motion by the argument. Perfectly well did she know that Gavin Ord had seen her in London, on the stage of the Carlton Theatre; and that discovery had looked her in the face twice in as many months This time, however, she feared it less; for she had come to believe by this time that she would presently be compelled to tell her story to all the world before many weeks had passed.

"We are not often in London," the Earl said dryly; "with such a house as this, why should we be? Lady Evelyn cares nothing for society. I regard it as the refuge of the mentally destitute. If I travel, it is from one solitude to another. A man is never so much master of himself and of the world as when he is alone. Can we consider the modern life as anything but a glorification of

the aggregate and not of the individual? Your profession is the best friend you have, Mr. Ord. Those who follow noble ends establish nobility in their own characters. That's a creed I wish I had known twenty years ago. You are a young man and should recite it every day while your youth remains to you."

Gavin replied that a man was neither older nor younger than his ideas; and the drift of the conversation being changed, to Evelyn's evident relief, they fell again to their plans for the restoration of the Hall and that which must be done before the wet weather set in. Until this time, Evelyn had scarcely noticed Gavin or taken any interest in his coming to the Manor. The truce between her father and herself left her in a dream-world from which there appeared to be no gate of escape whatever. She had neither counsellor nor friend. To Count Odin she had said, "You shall have my answer in three months' time." Her father's almost passionate desire for this marriage, which his own youth had contrived, won from her no promise more definite than that which she had given to the Count. The time had passed for any but the frankest expressions upon either side. In the plainest words, the Earl told her that this Roumanian had crossed Europe to demand the liberty of a man who had long been but a number in a prison upon the shores of the Black Sea.

"Let Georges Odin be released," he had said, "and unless you are his son's wife, he will kill me."

Lady Evelyn knew this to be no chimera of weakness or fear. The vengeance of the mountains would follow Robert Forrester even to the glades of Derbyshire. Witnesses to the truth still pitched their tents beneath the giant yews—the smoke of the gypsy camp drifted day by day, blue and lingering over the waters of the river. From these there was no escape, for they were the sentinels of the absent Count's honor, and they dogged the Earl's footsteps wherever he turned. When Gavin Ord appeared at the Manor, their suspicions were instantly aroused. They hid from him, and yet watched him every hour. Who was he; whence had he come? And was he also the enemy of the man who had been Zallony's friend? This they made it their purpose to discover, entering even Gavin's bedroom for that purpose.

He was very far from being a timid man or the episode referred to would quickly have driven him from Derbyshire, despite the engrossing interest of the work to which he had been called there. This was the third day of his residence at the Hall. Being left to himself immediately after dinner, he continued to draw for an hour and to read for another before courting sleep in the great black bed which tradition, loving the slumbers of kings, had allotted in its accustomed way to that very wakeful person, James II. His bedroom was high up in the northern tower of the house; a low-pitched spacious apartment with some fine Chippendale chairs in it and a dressing-table for which any Bond Street dealer would cheerfully have paid a thousand pounds. Gavin delighted in these

things because he was an artist; while the attendant luxury, the service of man and valet, the superb fittings of the bathroom adjoining his bedroom, the fruit, the cigarettes, the books which decorated the apartment, seemed in some way to be the reward of his own labors, not to speak of the attainments of long-cherished ambitions.

To this historic chamber he retired on the evening of the third day, and having added a little to his plans, read some pages of a county history and smoked a final and contemplative pipe, he undressed and got into bed, and for an hour or more slept that refreshing sleep which attends judicious success and a mind little given to trivialities. From this, against all habit, he passed to dreams, at first welcome and pleasing; dreams of broad acres and sheltering trees and a land of plenty—then to visions more disturbing, and to one, chiefly of a storm passing over the woods and his own spirit abroad in the storm and unable to find harborage. As a weary bird that can reach no shelter and is buffeted by every wind, so did he, in his dream, appear to be cast out from the world and unable to return to his home and kindred; a wanderer through a tempestuous night, beyond whose horizon, far beyond it but ever growing more distant, there arose the crimson light of day and the dawning beams of the hidden sun. Strive as he would he could not cast the darkness from him or shut out the sounds of wild winds blowing in his ears. Unseen hands held him back; voices mocked him; he heard the rustling of wings and was conscious of the movements

of unknown figures. And then he awoke to find a light shining full in his face and to see two black eyes peering down at him beyond it. But for an instant he saw them; then the light was blown out swiftly and utter darkness fell. He knew that he was not alone; but feared nothing, he knew not why.

Some man had entered his room while he slept and stood, he imagined, even at that moment so close to his bedside that he had but to put out a hand to touch him. Who the man was or what his errand might be, Gavin did not attempt even to guess. More by force of habit than from any other reason, he asked aloud, "Who is there, what do you want?"—but he did not expect to be answered, nor did any sound follow his question. Lying quite still upon the bed and beginning to be a little alarmed as his senses came back to him, he listened intently for an echo of footsteps across the polished floor, arguing that the unknown man would wear no boots and must turn the handle of a door to go. This was no burglar, he felt sure; and he was half willing to believe that he had dreamed the whole episode when a footfall made itself plainly audible, and was followed by a deep breath as of one who until that time had been afraid to breathe at all. Again Gavin asked, "What is it, what do you want?" The silence continued unbroken, and the fear of things unknown robbed him for the moment of the voice to repeat the question. This he set down afterward to the traditions of Melbourne Hall and his

intimate knowledge of them. He would not have been afraid in any other house.

Gavin stretched out his hand and tried to switch on the electric light. A clumsy effort in an unfamiliar room found him passing his fingers idly over a wainscoted wall; and when he felt for the reading lamp by his bedside, he overturned it with his elbow and could not replace the plug which his maladroitness had detached. Alarmed now as he never believed that any situation could alarm him, he sprang from his bed and felt with both hands extended for the figure which the room concealed. Hither, thither, with an oath upon his clumsiness, he sought the unknown, his hands touching unfamiliar objects, the darkness seeming almost to mock him. That the unknown man was still in the room he had no doubt whatever; for the interludes repeated the sound of quick breathing and he heard a garment rustling just as he had heard it in his sleep. Once, indeed, he felt the warm breath upon his cheek and struck savagely at an enemy of sounds, who still uttered no word nor would acknowledge his presence. Had he been calmer, he might have known that the darkness also deceived the intruder and that he too was at a loss to escape; but this Gavin did not discover until the door opened suddenly and a flash of light from the corridor struck across the room like a sunbeam suddenly admitted by a lifted blind. Then he saw the face of the escaping man for the second time and stood amazed at its familiarity.

"The old gypsy I saw in the park yesterday

walking with the Earl," he said, astounded, and then, "What in the devil's name is he doing here?"

That should not have been a difficult question to answer, and Gavin instantly determined to make no mention of it until the morning. The fellow was probably a thief, who had the run of the house and had taken advantage of its master's forbearance. It would be sufficient to name the circumstance at the breakfast table and to leave the rest to the Earl, who could act in the matter as he pleased. None the less, Gavin found his nerves much shaken and sleep for the remainder of the night was out of the question. Switching on every lamp in his room, and locking and bolting the heavy door, he sat by the open window and asked himself into what house of mysteries he had stumbled and what secrets it was about to reveal to him. But chiefly he asked where he had met the Lady Evelyn before . . . and memory befriending him suddenly, as memory will at a crisis, he exclaimed aloud:

"The Carlton Theatre—Haddon Hall—Etta Romney, by all that's amazing!"

Was the thought also a chimera of the night? He knew not what to think. The dawn found him still at his window debating it.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DUEL OVER THE TEA-CUPS

Gavin had always been an early riser and one who flouted the modern idea that the world should be aired before men went abroad. Faithful to his habit, the following morning found him riding in the park a little after seven o'clock; and not until the sweet cold air of the highlands had recompensed him for a waking night did he return to the Hall and the generous breakfast table there spread for him. A professed disciple of the simple life, Gavin confessed that the Earl's lavish hospitalities were altogether too much for his philosophy; and he ate and drank with the hearty relish of one to whom these unending luxuries were both a revelation in the art of living and a satire upon the habits of the rich.

What vast quantities of food were heaped upon that priceless sideboard—in dishes of shining silver, each warmed by the clear flame of a silver lamp beneath. Lift a lid of one of those granaries and there you would espy an omelet which none but a man from Paris could cook. Peep into another and there are eggs prepared so cunningly that they would melt the heart of Master Fastidity himself. Fish and fowl and flesh, great red joints upon the buffet, exquisite peaches from the hot-

houses, bunches of grapes that would have taken prizes in any show—how ironical to remember the class of man who usually sat to such a table, his *ennui,* his distaste, and the abstinence cure the physicians compelled him to practise. Gavin was just a hearty Englishman, fit and strenuous and needing no "waters" to make life endurable. He took what came to him and made no bones about it. Had he been a rich man himself, he would have done the same, he thought. Humbug was no part of his creed, and he never mistook necessity for self-sacrifice.

The Earl had not come down when he entered the famous breakfast-room, and, not a little to his satisfaction, he found himself alone with Lady Evelyn for the first time since his arrival at the Manor. A student of faces always, he studied this face to-day with a curiosity which he set down to his own delusions rather than to an absolute interest in the personality of a stranger. A beautiful woman he had admitted her to be when first he saw her by her father's side upon the night which carried him to the Hall. But now his scrutiny went deeper, and, so far as opportunity served, he looked at her as one seeking a woman's secret, and seeking it with a man's desire to help her.

And first he said that it was an English face in repose, and yet not an English face when the repose was lost. The masses of jet black hair would have excited no surprise upon the Corso at Rome or shining in an aureole cast out from a Florentine window. Here, in England, the tresses spoke

of the South and its suns—and yet, in flat contradiction, the perfect skin, smooth and silky as the leaf of a pink white rose, could tell of English lanes and sunless days and the kinder climate of the North. Character he read in the firm contour of her chin—romance and passion in the deep blue of her eyes and the modulations of a voice whose music had not been lost in the roaring Saturnalia of the modern *salon*. That he himself had so far failed to attract her notice was a fact which neither wounded his vanity nor abated his interest. It had been the first maxim of his life to hasten slowly, and to no pursuit was this maxim more necessary than to that of friendship.

This, then, was the estimate which one strong personality formed of another; the man saying to himself, "I would read this woman's heart!" the woman asking herself if she must talk architecture until the Earl came to her assistance. Breaking the ice with a common observation, she remarked that she had seen him galloping across the park and regretted the dilatory habit which kept her in bed.

"Getting up is a foreign art," she said. "It lives in kitchens and places where they scrub. The doctors positively forbid it nowadays. And, of course, life is too short to disobey the doctors."

Gavin looked at her with the air of a man who has too much common sense to deal in frivolities and rarely troubled to say the thing which was not.

"They talk nonsense," he said quietly; "the profession is becoming far too commercial. It lives

and thrives upon the credulity of fools. Just consider—man is the only animal which does not glory in the Creator's gift, the dawning day and all its wonders. For what do we change it? For the electric light and the champagne which disagrees with us? We borrow of the night and then grumble because we have nothing to offer the day. If men could get up at five o'clock and go to bed at ten, they would begin to understand the realities of living."

Evelyn, much amused at his earnestness and quite understanding that some pleasant originality of character dictated the outburst, looked at him a little mischievously from beneath her long lashes while she said:

"In winter—surely not five o'clock then, Mr. Ord?"

"Not at all," was the quick reply; "we are expected to use our common sense in the matter. A winter's dawn is distinctly unpleasant; have nothing to do with it. A true benefactor of mankind would help us to hibernate. Imagine how splendid it would be to sleep from the twenty-sixth day of December until the first day of April. Those are the months of the income tax—of no interest to you, Lady Evelyn, but of great importance to poor people who are unable to help the Government to throw hay into the sea from the shores of South Africa. Blot out the winter, by all means; but leave us the summer, and do not expect us to spend the best hours of it in bed."

"Am I, then, personally guilty in the matter? Frankly, you will never convert me. I am hateful

before ten o'clock, and if I go riding before that time, the very horses tremble. Consider what going to bed at ten o'clock would mean to us in the season?"

"I have considered it often. We should be spared a large number of very indifferent plays; a great many falsehoods would not be told to our acquaintances; old gentlemen would not, under such circumstances, need to go to Carlsbad to be scrubbed. You would save vast quantities of good food; learn what the country is to those who really know it; and, perhaps, discover that strange personality, yourself. Why should we be so frightened of such an excellent companion? Men and women tell you that they do not like to be alone. Is not that to say that they desire to keep self at a distance. The fellow would be troublesome, ask questions, and that sort of thing. But let others always be shouting in our ears (and modern society has excellent lungs), then we keep the stranger out and are glad to be quit of him. Some achieve the same end by work. I am one of them. When my work gets hold of me I cannot answer a common question decently. Sometimes I wake up suddenly and say, 'My dear Gavin, how are you getting on and what have you been doing all this time?' I become solicitous for the fellow and want to peep into his private books. That is often at dawn, Lady Evelyn, just when the sun is shooting up over the horizon. Then a man may not be ashamed to meet himself. For the rest of the time he is often play-acting."

A faint blush came to her cheeks and she turned away her head.

"Why not if play-acting amuses us? Perhaps we are not all contented with that amiable stranger, ourselves. Some other figure of the present or the past may seem more desirable as a friend. Is there any law of Nature which compels us to take one personality rather than another? Cannot you imagine a man or a woman living years of make-believe—play-acting always, if by play-acting they can discover a world more desirable than the one they live in? We speak of imagination as a rare gift. I doubt if it is so. Even little children have their dream-worlds, and they are more remarkable than any books. I would say that your outlook is too limited. You see one side of life, Mr. Ord, and quarrel with those who can look tolerantly upon both."

Gavin was honest enough to admit that it might be so.

"Yes," he said, "I grant you that the world is sometimes better for make-believe. If we did not deceive ourselves, some of us would commit suicide. The age is to blame for the necessity. We have not color enough in our lives, and even our devotions are often entirely selfish. Witness the case of a modern millionaire who is proud of being called 'a hustler.' This rogue tells his friends that he has no time for ordinary social intercourse. My answer is that he ought to be hanged out of hand. Such a fellow never comes face to face with himself once in twenty years. Men envy him and yet despise him. Take the meanest hero of mediæ-

val fiction and place him side by side with a Gould or a Vanderbilt. What a very monarch he becomes! Total up the riches of a trust and remember Mozart died of starvation. Vulgarity everywhere—none of us is free from it. Our very ambitions are advertised."

"And we have not even the courage to hide ourselves in nunneries."

"They would come here with cameras and photograph our habits. No, we must accept the position frankly and make the best of it. That carries me round the circle. By getting up with the sun we see something of ourselves sometimes. Our work is not then the whole occupation of the day."

"But yours, surely, is not work you despise, Mr. Ord?"

"So little that I fear it on that very account, Just imagine how this house is going to make a captive of me. I shall know every stone of it before a month has passed. I will tell you then all its truths and all its fables. The dead will become my intimate friends. I shall reconstruct from the beginning. I must do it, for how shall I dare to touch the hallowed walls unless something of the builder's secret is known to me. In six months' time I will show the harvest of dreams. In six months' time——"

"In six months' time! What an age to wait! I may not be in England then."

"You will return to be my critic."

"I may never return."

"Never return! my dear lady, you could not

possibly desert Melbourne Hall. The very stones would cry out upon you."

"Oh," she said, looking straight into his face; "my husband may not like England, you know."

"I will believe it when he has the courage to tell me so."

"Men are generally courageous when it is a question of telling a woman what they do not like. I am to live in Bukharest, be it known. My summers will be spent in the Carpathians. I shall become a child of the primitive colors—the red, the blue, and the orange—which Menie Muriel Dowie tells us are an eternal delight to the eyes. I am promised glorious weeks on the Black Sea, and more glorious weeks on seas which are not black. The sun is always shining there—why should one want to come back to England?"

Had anyone asked Evelyn why she spoke in this way to a stranger, a man of whose existence she had hardly been aware yesterday, she would certainly have been unable to give a satisfactory answer. To no other in all her life had she spoken so openly and so readily as to this fair-haired, blue-eyed Englishman, who did not appear to have one grain of humbug in all his body. Her surprise was not greater than her pleasure; she would not deny that it pleased her thus to confess intimate thoughts which she had not shared even with her own father. Gavin, upon his part, a servant of candor always, observed nothing unusual in her freedom; but he could ask himself already if she were in love with the man to whom her future was pledged.

"We are forgetting how to be serious," he rejoined; "that is also one of the vices of the age. People chatter away as though words were enough and the truth of words nothing at all. You do not mean anything you say, and you expect me to listen to you in the same spirit. I decline to do so. If you go to Bukharest, you will come back again before the year is out. As for the blue, red and orange, well, I could as soon imagine you buying an early Victorian sideboard. That is my frank opinion. You must forgive me if it offends?"

He looked straight into her eyes and she did not turn away. Gavin Ord was unlike any man she had known—not by mere cleverness alone, but by that strength of will and character which could not fail to assert itself in any company, whatever its nature. Here sat one whom, were he to command her, she would certainly obey. Such a possibility of docility astonished Evelyn beyond measure—but it also encouraged her to put a question to him.

"Frank opinions need no forgiveness," she said. "I am longing for more, Mr. Ord. You told me last night that you believed you had met me in London. Please tell me where it was."

She asked the question with some pretty pretence of indifference which did not deceive him for an instant. It is better, he thought, that I should tell her, and so he said, without any affectation whatever:

"I am quite wrong, of course; but when I thought the matter over I remembered that a

young actress, who made a great sensation at the Carlton Theatre in May, might have been named for your own sister. That is what gave me the idea that I had seen you before."

"How strange! Do you also remember the lady's name?"

"Perfectly. All London went mad over her. She called herself Etta Romney, and the play showed just such a house as this. It was the old story of Di Vernon retold, Lady Evelyn."

"You were much taken with the play, it appears?"

"Not with the play at all. But I thought Etta Romney one of the cleverest women I have ever seen on the stage."

"Is she playing still, may I ask?"

"You know that she is not, Lady Evelyn."

"I know it—are you serious?"

"So serious that I shall forget the subject until you choose to speak of it again."

"But it interests me greatly," she pleaded, with that insistence which often attends the discussion of things better avoided. "If I am really so like somebody else, ought I not to be curious? You say——"

"Indeed, I say nothing," he exclaimed quickly, and then in a lower voice—"at least until the Earl has breakfasted."

She did not reply. The Earl entered the room and began at once to speak of Gavin's work and the arrangements which must be made for it.

CHAPTER XIX

FROM THE BELFRY TOWER

Gavin's little band of workmen ran up a light scaffold of ladders and boards for him against the belfry tower, and had it finished upon the morning of the conversation with the Lady Evelyn. To this height he climbed early in the day, when began an examination of the decaying fabric and set down the first lines of the report he had to make to the Earl. The old building was in a shocking state certainly; the plumb-line declared surprising departures from that stately grace of perpendicularity the text-books had taught him to esteem. Gavin should have taken the greatest interest in all this, but he did not. Had you spoken to him yesterday, he would have been ready to declare that nothing on earth could be more fascinating than the very task he now pretended to be engaged upon; but his habitual candor came to his rescue to-day and he now pronounced the work to be almost distasteful. For, in truth, he had discovered a secret as old as man, and the delight of that new knowledge surpassed the worker's dreams by far.

He stood upon a dizzy height, but custom had staled the peril of his employment, and, in this aspect, fear was unknown to him. A high trem-

bling ladder permitted him to climb up to a couple of boards suspended from the parapet above by frail ropes cunningly wound about the embrasures of the battlements. He stood with his back to a mossy wall; beneath him lay the fair domain of Melbourne Hall; its ancient trees so many children's fretted toys; its grass lands supremely green; pool and lake and river ablaze with the golden light of an Autumn sun. But more to Gavin than these was the figure of the Lady Evelyn herself, clearly to be seen in the glade where the gypsies had pitched their camp—the figure of an English girl divinely tall, of one whom the splendid woods might well choose for their divinity.

She rode through the glade and by her side their walked a rough fellow, who, Gavin thought, would have been much better in Derby jail than idling in the home park at Melbourne. Some chance observations which had fallen from servants' lips had made him acquainted with the circumstances under which these apparent vagrants had come to Derbyshire; and he was quick enough to perceive the connection between the Earl's younger days and this odd visitation.

"He knew these fellows in Roumania and they have come here to blackmail him," was the unspoken comment. "Their master is a shady Roumanian Count—one of the long-haired brand, who ogle the women. I take it that she had promised to marry this man, not altogether at her father's bidding, but just because he is romantic liar enough to appeal to one side of her imagination.

That's what sent her to London play-acting. She had to escape from this monotony or it would have killed her. Well, I think I know the temperament—a very dangerous temperament which has sent many a woman the wrong way and will send many more before the world is done with."

He turned again to the crumbling stone work and passed his hand idly over it. This old house, how many women's hearts had it not imprisoned and stilled! What stories of woman's love and passion could it not unfold if these rotting stones might speak? Many a Di Vernon had gone forth from secret doors to meet her lover; many a one had lived and died with her girlish secret unspoken. Study in those records and the true story of Evelyn, my Lord of Melbourne's daughter, would be read. A brave girl, a lonely girl, full of the stuff of which dreams are made, such he believed her to be. And she had come suddenly into his life, bidding him turn from his work to gaze after her, impotently as a man may look upon a precious thing he may never possess. For even if she loved him, what right had he to speak to her; what position or name had he to give her? He was a worker in clay. Bricks and mortar were not the tokens in which a woman's imagination deals.

"If I built a cathedral," he said to himself ironically, "she would merely say, 'How draughty!' It is necessary to be a brigand or a musician to reach the heart of her desires."

So the work went on a little savagely. He had the scaffold shifted to the tower of the chapel

where the clock face records the deeds of that Lord of Melbourne who fell with Picton's troop at Waterloo. "Time passed above his head but will turn to look at him . . ." the inscription went. Gavin was cleaning the dust of the century from it when he heard a voice upon the parapet above, and looking up he perceived my Lady Evelyn there, standing by the battlement and watching him curiously.

"Is not that dreadfully dangerous?" she asked him, indicating the frail scaffold upon which he stood.

He answered at once by another question.

"Do you refer to Time? If so, yes, it is always dangerous. Time never sleeps, remember."

She laughed and leaned over, a little afraid of the height, but desiring, she knew not why, to hear him talk.

"You will not look Time in the face, then?" she said; "or does the bell of Time speak to you? I know people in France who always cross themselves when the clock chimes the hour."

"The bells chime eternity—oh, yes. Time rarely laughs if it is not ironically. Here's a clock which tries to tell all the world how a brave man died. Time passed him by, but returns twice a day to have a look at him. The dirt of nearly a hundred years is cast upon his monument by Time. The ages used to be cleaner, Lady Evelyn. Nowadays we trample mud on every tomb. There is always an 'if' for the best of our friends."

"Meaning that some disappointment has made a cynic of you, Mr. Ord?"

"Perhaps, I cannot tell you. What is the good of ideals in this twentieth century? We have learned to scoff at simple things, faith, honesty, even courage. Rich men try to believe that they were never poor and the poor believe that they are rich—and go through the Bankruptcy Court accordingly. I could do great work in the world, but my enemy is an estimate. A man no longer builds a temple to the glory of God; he builds it to the memory of John Snooks, hog-merchant. Most of our ailments are the penalty of soullessness. If we lived and strived toward an end, the mind would not smart so often as the body. That saps our courage as well. I can work upon a scaffold like this because I have the past all round about me. But directly I cease to work I become a coward. Time is dangerous because Time is truth; one of the few truths our modern life permits us to recognize."

"Then you do really believe that the old glory of achievement lingers somewhere?"

"In the imagination of men who would be artists but remain the servants of Mammon. Let me interrupt you to beg a favor. Your arm is shifting the rope and if it gave way——"

"The rope—the one I am leaning against? Does that go down to your scaffolding? I never noticed it."

"There is no damage done," he said quietly; "please pull it down over the stone-work. No, hardly that way. Let me come up and show you."

A short ladder led up from the scaffold to the roof of the clock tower. The foothold of planks

was held up by stout ropes wound about the embrasures of the parapets. Unconsciously as she talked to him, Evelyn had shifted the right-hand rope from its place and Gavin's heart leaped when he perceived that in another instant boards and man and ladder must go headlong to the stone terrace below. In truth, the climax came while the light words were still upon his lips, and the rope, slipping away from the girl's weak hand, the scaffold swung out in an instant and Gavin was left above the abyss, his fingers twined about the second rope and his feet vainly seeking a hold against the time-worn stone.

Men fight for their lives in many ways—the cowards desperately and without reason, brave men with a quick apprehension of the circumstances and a bold course from which fear does not divert them. Desperate as Gavin's situation had become, he realized the whole truth of it in an instant. Forty feet below him was the square flagged pavement built about the belfry door. Above him a single rope swayed and strained against the stone of the parapet, here bulging outward and difficult to climb. If the rope held, Gavin believed that he might touch the parapet, but to mount it would be an acrobat's task. Other help seemed impossible to bring. His assistants had gone down to the outer stables to load up the permanent scaffold. His quick eye could not detect the presence of a single human being in the vicinity of the gardens. Evelyn herself stood as one petrified by the battlements, afraid for the instant to lift a hand or utter a word lest the spell

of his momentary safety would be broken. She had never possessed that particular courage which stands upon a height unflinchingly, and this dreadful accident found all her nervous impulse paralyzed and shattered. She listened, as in a trance of terror beyond all words to describe, for the broken cry which would speak of death; for the sound of a body falling upon the flags below. Infinitely beyond Gavin Ord's, her imagination added its darkest picture to her handiwork. She clinched her hands, fearing their clumsiness, and with eyes half-closed drew back from the battlements. Never until this day had she seen a man die; never had she been asked to take an instantaneous resolution wherein the measure of her own peril might be the measure of another man's safety. If for the briefest instant she failed to answer the call, cowardice had no part in her irresolution. Few would have acted otherwise.

Gavin climbed the rope almost inch by inch, seeking as he did so a foothold upon the rotting stone and careful always to bring no sudden jerk upon the trembling cord. It seemed an eternity before he reached the forbidding parapet where the graver danger must be faced; but when he did so and tried to put an arm over the bulging stone, then he understood that if none came to his assistance, he was most certainly doomed. Beneath him, the crumbling cornice became so much powdered dust whenever his feet touched it—he could find no foothold there, nor so much as feel a single projection upon the buttress by which he might pull himself up to safety. And his wrists now

ached with a pain which threatened to become intolerable, the rope cut his hands until drops of blood trickled from them to his face. Salvation depended upon that which he could do while a man might count twenty, and with death looking up at him exultingly, he made a last effort to surmount the bulging parapet and in the same instant told himself that it was impossible.

"My God," he cried aloud; "I cannot do it—I cannot do it!"

Perhaps he no longer feared death. There is this merit of exhaustion in danger that it blinds the imagination and leaves indifference to the ultimate issue. Gavin was just at that point when a man is incapable of further effort, even in the cause of his own safety, when, looking up, he perceived Evelyn at the balustrade, her face deathly white, her eyes shining terror; but her acts were as cool and collected as they had been when first he met her in the long gallery of Melbourne Hall. Waked from the trance of fear by the words he had spoken, she cast one quick glance at the figure swaying upon the rope; then turned about her and, stooping, she picked up the long rope which her own maladroitness had displaced from the battlements. Methodically and without a blunder, she made a noose in this and passed it over the parapet.

"Slip your arm over it," she said, in a voice that betrayed no emotion whatever. "I will tie it to the weather-vane—please, please try. I can help you—I am very strong, Mr. Ord. Yes, that

is the way—now take my hand—don't be afraid to hurt me—yes, yes, like that."

He slipped one arm over the noose and changing hands cleverly upon the other rope and digging his feet deep into the rotting stone, he drew the noose around his body while she caught up the slack of the cord and bound it round and round the great iron pillar of the weather-vane which crowns the Belfry Tower of Melbourne Hall. His position was such in this instant that he hung out clear above the abyss with his face upon a level with the parapet and his body backward to the flags below. All depended upon the iron pillar of the weather-vane and the stuff of which the rope was made. Gavin had no alternative but to trust to it, and he swung himself out fearlessly with one earnest prayer for safety upon his lips. So near to him that he wondered that his arms could not touch her was the figure of Evelyn, seeming to beckon him to salvation. He felt the noose draw tight about his body, and for some instants he swung to and fro almost with the content of one who has waged a good fight and would sleep. Then her voice came welcomely to his ears once more, bidding him make an effort; and at this he pulled himself up almost with superhuman will and touched the round of the stone-work with his hands laid flat upon it and his knees bent upon the balustrade. Would he fall back once more or had she the strength to save him? Her little hands had caught him by the wrists now; and, kneeling, she exerted a strength she had never known herself to possess. Must

they go crashing together to the flags shining in the sunlight below? In vain he supplicated her to release her hold and leave him to do battle for himself.

"I shall pull you over," he cried madly. "For God's sake, leave me to myself!"

She scarcely heard him; her eyes were closed, her lips were hard set; she had thrown her whole weight backward from the hips and with every muscle straining, every danger forgotten, but that of the man whose safety she had imperilled, she drew him to her side and fell fainting before him.

Gavin was dizzy and sick from fear. His hands were cut and bleeding; his clothes torn to ribbons; he could hear the heavy pulsation of his heart when he bent to lift Evelyn in his strong arms as one who, henceforth, had some right to do so.

"The worst may become the best," he said to himself quietly; "she will tell me her story now."

And so he carried her down to the Long Gallery and Melbourne Hall heard of the accident for the first time.

CHAPTER XX

LOVERS

Gavin's belief that Evelyn would now make a confidant of him rested largely upon a knowledge of human nature, which the great and successful school of endeavor had revealed to him. Nor was he in any way mistaken. The intimacy of a peril, mutually dared and overcome, brought the man and the woman together as years of social intercourse could not have done. That very night they walked in the Italian Gardens of Melbourne Hall and spoke as freely as brother and sister might have done.

"I like your guest," Gavin began—and he referred to a young solicitor by name Gilbert Ray, who had come down from London by the afternoon train—"I like your guest. The fact that he is losing his hair is a point in his favor. When you think how much the head of a prosperous lawyer must carry, it is a wonder that there is room for any of the commoner emotions at all. Not a month ago, Sir Francis Sutton told me that he could lock up half the great people in town, politicians included, by one turn of a little key in his safe. My fingers would be itching all day to open that safe if I were he. Just think of the blessings I should confer upon the halfpenny

papers. A Cabinet Minister in the police court. They would leave the war out altogether next day. After all, the world takes nothing very seriously nowadays."

"Not even itself," said Evelyn, almost as one speaking with regret. "We are growing too cynical even to deceive ourselves, and that used to be the most pleasant of all amusements. But I agree with you about Mr. Ray. His face is an honest one. I wonder if it is any drawback to him in his business."

Gavin laughed, wondering perhaps at the flippancy of their talk and their mutual desire to avoid any reference to that which had befallen them earlier in the day. By common consent they would not speak of the accident; each believed that some self-applause must attend the recital of it, and, save for a few brief words when Evelyn had recovered that morning, their resolution of silence remained unshaken. Out here upon the open lawns with the deep crimson shades of the dining-room making a fairy scene behind them; out here where the night breeze was like a breath of a tired sleeper and the river below droned a lullaby, it was difficult enough to realize that death had been so recently their neighbor. Nor had they the desire to do so. This new intimacy of association was a gracious gift to them both; and Evelyn, not less than he, understood that it might yet influence the years to come.

"Honesty is always a drawback in certain professions," Gavin said, as they wandered away from the open windows to the darker shades be-

neath the yews; "an honest doctor would be in danger of starving, while an honest photographer would certainly go to the workhouse. Mr. Ray, at least, was honest in his desire to get rid of us. His remarks upon the beauty of the evening I found quite superfluous."

"My father is very anxious to talk to him," Evelyn said quickly. "I am sure you have remarked his abstracted manner since you came here. A stranger would notice such things at once. He is not well, and I fear is in great trouble, Mr. Ord. Perhaps he will tell Mr. Ray. I hope sincerely that he will do so."

"Then he has said nothing to you, Lady Evelyn?"

"He has said that which I find great difficulty in understanding. I wish it were otherwise. A woman is never able to estimate a man's danger correctly. There are so many things of which she takes no account."

"When she will not permit a man to help her. I am asking you to tell me the story, you see. It has been in my mind to do so for some hours past. Of course, I have known that there is a story. I should never regret coming to Melbourne Hall if I could be of the slightest use to you, Lady Evelyn. Will you not make me your friend?"

He drew her still farther apart, down to that very bridge he had crossed the night he came to the Hall; that night of weird hallucination and childish phantoms. Standing by the low balustrade (she half-sitting upon it and watching the eddies in the pool below), she spoke of Etta Rom-

ney and of a young girl whose dreams had sent her to London.

"I have always delighted to live in a world of my own making," she said frankly. "There are days together when I believe myself to be some one else and act and do that which I believe they would have acted and done. The theatre stood to me for a very heaven of self-deceptions. I read of it in books, dreamed of it in my sleep, tried to picture it as it must be. Oh, yes, I have spoken my own plays aloud beneath the trees of this Park so many days. I was Di Vernon, my Lady Beatrice, Viola, Desdemona, all the young girls you can name in the books. Sometimes I had the idea to run away and hide myself from everyone in that great picture land my visions showed to me. No one here could share my thoughts. My father adored me, but has never understood me. To him, I am the child of the woman he loved beyond anything on earth. He guards me as though some change would come upon me if he ceased his vigilance. Then irony appears and says it is my father who is changing. I have been aware of it ever since Count Odin visited us. These wild men have brought misfortune to our house and God knows where we are drifting. I thought at one time that if I married the Count that would be the end of everything. I can believe it no longer. My father is tempted to sacrifice me; but he would regret it all his lite if he did so. Can you blame me if I think of London again—seriously and forever?"

Gavin answered her with difficulty. He knew

so few of the facts of her story as yet that his common sense warned him to speak guardedly.

"I should be the last to blame you," he said slowly; "but surely there is an alternative? We take a desperate step when other and wiser roads are closed to us. Let me try to understand it better. Count Odin, you say, has some hold upon your father——"

"I did not say so, surely——"

"Then I imagine as much. He has some hold upon your father, obtained by that which happened in Bukharest many years ago. Do you know precisely what his claim is?"

"His father's liberty. The old Chevalier Georges Odin is a prisoner in one of the mines on the borders of the Black Sea. The Count declares that this is my father's work. I cannot tell you if it be true or false. If it is true, I will see that we leave no stone unturned to set Georges Odin free. I wish I could be so sure that his liberty will bring no peril upon my father."

"The men were enemies, then?"

"I have understood as much. They were rivals for my dead mother's hand."

"And your father profited by his enemy's political misfortune?"

"I must believe it, since he is afraid to give this man his liberty."

"A natural fear—in Roumania; not, I think, in England. Will you let me ask how your marriage with the young Count would help your father in his difficulty?"

"I do not know, unless it is assumed that as

Georges Odin's daughter-in-law, I should pay the debt my father owes."

"And save him from a purely imaginary danger?"

"Would you think it purely imaginary when you remember the guests we entertain in our Park?"

"The gypsies—could the police say nothing to them? Remember we are living in England, where all the fine sentiments preached in Southern Europe are so many heroics to be laughed at. If a Roumanian were to challege me to avenge the honor of my ancestors by cutting his throat in the Carpathians, I should put his letter among my curiosities. Vendettas and secret societies and such absurdities have no place among us outside the theatre. That's why I say that this matter should be dealt with in an English way. If your father has done any man a wrong, he, as an English gentleman, will do his best to put it right. All the rest is merely tall talk. It should not even be taken into account, and would not be, I think, unless there are circumstances of which I know nothing. That is why I speak with reservation. I know so little of your father, and he is one of the most difficult men to know that I have met."

Evelyn shook her head.

"Every man is difficult to know and every woman," he said philosophically; "those who seem most superficial are often the people we understand least. Here am I talking to you as I have never talked to anyone in all my life, and yet you know nothing about me whatever."

"I differ from that entirely."

"Indeed, it is true. If it were not, you would not have asked me why I let them say that I am going to marry Count Odin."

"You let them say it because it is too foolish to contradict."

"Nothing of the kind. I let them say it because my mother would have married his father had her wishes been consulted. Oh, I know that so well. Every day my inheritance speaks to me. I am afraid of him, and yet am drawn toward him. I detest him and yet go to him. Do you wonder that London seems my only way of escape—the theatre where Etta Romney can come to life again and Evelyn be forgotten?"

She spoke with some excitement as she always did when the silent voice within told her again of those triumphs awaiting her upon the stage in London whenever she had the mind to seek them. Gavin thought that he understood her; but her confession troubled him none the less. Almost formal as their conversation had been, there was that in the timbre of their voices, in their steps, their gestures, their looks, which declared the pleasure of their intimacy and would have betrayed the mutual secret to any who might have overheard them. Love, indeed, laughed aside at the prim phrases and the mock sophistries—and none realized this more surely than Gavin.

"I hope it would be as a last resource," said Gavin presently, still thinking of her threat to return to the theatre. "You must not forget

that your friends may have something to say in the matter."

"My friends! Who are my friends?" she exclaimed hotly. "The chattering doctor, who is always looking for an excuse to feel my pulse. The vicar, who is so dreadfully afraid of his wife hearing the nonsense he talks to me. Young John Hall, who can speak of nothing else but Yorkshire cricket scores. I have no friends—unless it be the dogs."

Gavin drew a little nearer to her, and confronting her suddenly, he said:

"Then here is a new breed of hound and one that will be faithful."

She turned away her head, forgetting that the darkness hid her crimson cheeks from him.

"I must not listen to you—I, who am to be Count Odin's wife," she said.

"You will never be Count Odin's wife," he rejoined. "I forbid it, you have given me the right. Listen to me, Evelyn. The night I came to Melbourne Hall, I heard a voice calling to me as I crossed this very bridge. It was your voice. I looked over and I saw a face down there in the river and it was your face. That night I did not know why Destiny had sent me to this house. But I know it now, and it makes me say to you, 'I love you—I love you, Evelyn, and my love will save you.' When you tell me that you must not hear me, it is not yourself speaking but another. I love you, and, before God, I will not rest day or night until I have saved your father and you from this shadow which has come upon your lives.

It is yours to give me the right to do so—here and now, the right your heart bids you give me and you will not deny."

He took her hands in both of his and drew her toward him. She resisted him a brief moment; then suddenly, as though disguise were idle, she lifted her lips to his and kissed him.

"From myself," she said; "save me from myself."

CHAPTER XXI

ZALLONY'S SON

Gavin permitted her to escape his arms when he heard the Earl calling to them from the Italian garden above the river. A sense of exultation, of ecstasy no words could measure, possessed him as he watched the slim white-clad figure, here disappearing, there showing itself again between the ramparts of the splendid trees. She was his, henceforth and forever. All her beauty, her charm, her intellect, every grace of speech and manner had passed to his possession.

This stately girl of whom the countryside spoke as of some wondrous divinity, she had promised to become his wife; for him the warm kisses of her lips, the declared secrets of her eloquent eyes, the passionate ardor of her embraces. Yesterday he would have called himself a madman to have dared the meanest of the hopes which now might be regarded with equanimity. To-night he could recall them with that kind incredulity which even attends the first hours of such an avowal as this. What act or purpose of his life had brought him such a reward; why had she deemed him worthy? he asked himself. He was neither a vain man nor a fool. If he contemplated his good fortune with a just trepidation, none the less he believed

himself to merit it. She loved him, and henceforth might claim his life. This was the whole lesson of the first brief moments of delight.

Gavin was far too excited to think of returning to the Castle; nor had he any wish to speak to the Earl until his own story presented itself to him in some reasonably plausible shape. Under other circumstances, he could have understood the anger and the impatience which such a declaration might bring upon him; but these he did not expect at Melbourne Hall. Robert Forrester seemed to him rather an aristocrat by accident than by birth. He, himself, would not in any case consider the dignity of his own life and calling as beneath that of one whose ancestors had been the jest of London in the days of the Stuarts. He had the right of an honored name, of considerable achievement, and of his youth; and by these he claimed her. Moreover, the secrets of the Hall were now his own; and he understood that the forgotten years stalked as ghosts through the splendid chambers, speaking of passions outlived and of the aftermath to be garnered from their fields. Father and daughter alike were reaping that which had been sown in Bukharest more than twenty years ago. From his just judgment, from her birthright, it lay upon the stranger to save them. Gavin determined to begin his work that very night.

He had lighted a pipe when Evelyn left him, and with this glowing in the darkness, he set out, with no definite purpose in his mind, toward the gypsy encampment down in the hollow by the

river. Behind him, Melbourne Hall stood up as a glittering palace of a wonder-world, its windows casting out their brilliant jets to make blacker darkness in the gardens, and many a picture revealed to speak of ancient centuries and the momentous history of the house. Ahead of him lay the moonlit park, the giant yews and elms, the matchless oaks, glades and dells, where from the elves should come unsurpassable avenues and all the beauty of the forest scene. Gavin walked on, however, oblivious of the night or its wonders. He had a vague idea that he might learn something from the rogues and vagabonds who had followed Count Odin to Melbourne Hall; and, with this idea indicating his path, he came presently to the thicket beyond which the encampment lay. There a sound of voices arrested his attention. Plainly, he said, a woman was speaking; and while the surprise of this discovery was still upon him, the music of a violin, weird and echoing, began to accompany the speaker in a song so plaintive that the very spirit of sorrow appeared to breathe in every note of it.

Gavin listened to the music spell-bound, and yet a little ashamed of his position. No possible advantage to himself or others would have induced him to play an eavesdropper's part at Melbourne or elsewhere. If he lingered in the shadow of the thicket, it was because the music compelled him and he could not escape its fascinations. When the sound of the voice died away, he turned about to come at the encampment by another

road; and then he became aware for the first time that he did not stand there alone. A pair of black eyes, shining like a cat's in the darkness, looked up at him as it were from his very shoulder. Returning their gaze, but not without a quickening pulse and some apprehension of danger, he could, at length, outline the figure of a man, slim and agile, and yet not without a certain grace to be perceived even in such a light. That this fellow was one of the gypsies he had no doubt at all. The clear moonlit night revealed the oval face, the restless eyes, the long, tapering hands of a Romany. Gavin remarked the hands particularly, for one of them was thrust into the bosom of a spotlessly white and clinging shirt—and that hand, he said, covered the hilt of a gypsy's knife. So it was to be a hazardous encounter after all. He understood too well that if he moved so much as a foot, this gypsy would stab him.

"Why do you watch us, sir?"

The English was execrable but the meaning quite plain. Gavin answered as abruptly:

"I am listening to your music."

The gypsy, utterly lost in his attempts to continue in a tongue of which he knew so little, stammered for an instant and then asked curtly:

"Do you speak German, sir?"

"Possibly as well as you do; I have been three years in that excellent country."

"Please to tell me who you are, then, and why you come to his Excellency's house?"

Gavin laughed at the impertinence of it. Speaking in fluent German, he said:

"I might very well put that question to you. Shall I say, then, that I am not here to answer your questions. Come, we had better be frank with each other. I may be able to help you."

This was a new idea to the gypsy and one that caused him some perplexity. A little reflection convinced him that the stranger was right.

"Very well," he said, "we will talk about it. Come to my tent and Djala shall make us coffee. Why not be friends? Yes, we might help each other, as you say. Let us talk first and then we can quarrel."

He led the way through a path of the dell, powdering the ground with the golden dust of wild flowers as he went. The encampment had been enlarged considerably since Evelyn discovered it on the gypsies first coming to Moretown. There were no less than seven tents; and the biggest of these, the one to which Gavin's guide now conducted him, had been furnished with lavish generosity. Old silver lamps from the Hall cast a warm, soft light upon the couches and rugs about; there were old tapestries hung against the canvas; tables glittering with silver ornaments; a buffet laden with bottles and silver boxes. But the chief ornament was Djala, a little Hungarian girl, and such a perfect picture of wild beauty that Gavin stared at her amazed.

"Here is Djala," the guide said, with a gesture of his hand toward her. "I am known as Zallony's son. His Excellency may have spoken of me."

"I know nothing," said Gavin simply. "Per-

mit me to tell the young lady that she has a charming voice. I have never heard music that fascinated me so much."

"It is the music of a nation of musicians, sir. Please to sit down. Djala will serve us cigarettes and coffee."

The girl laughed pleasantly, showing a row of shining white teeth and evidently understanding that a compliment had been paid her by the stranger. When she had served the coffee and cigarettes, she ran away with a coquette's step and they heard her singing outside to the soft accompaniment of a zither. Zallony's son smoked meanwhile with the contemplative silence of the Oriental; and Gavin, waiting for him, would not be the first to break the truce.

"So you have been in Germany, sir?"

"I was there three years," said Gavin.

"You know Bukharest, it may be?"

"Not at all, though a lady's book was on the point of sending me to the Carpathians."

"You should go and see my country; it is the finest in the world."

"I will take care to do so on the earliest opportunity."

"Make friends with my people and they will be your friends. We never forget, sir. That is why I am here in this English country, because we never forget."

"The best of qualities. . . . They tell me that your father was his Excellency's friend in Roumania many years ago."

The gypsy looked at him questioningly.

"It is as you say, sir. They were brothers of the hills. When the houses burned and the women ran from the soldiers, then men said it is Zallony and the English lord. There was another with them. He is in prison now—he who was my father's friend. Sir, I come to England to give him liberty."

Gavin was greatly interested. He drained the little cup of coffee, and, filling a pipe slowly, he said:

"What forbids your success?"

Zallony's son looked him straight in the face.

"A lady known to us—she may forbid it, sir."

"You cannot mean the Lady Evelyn?"

"We will not speak of names. You have her confidence. Say to her that when she is false to my friend, Count Odin, I will kill her."

"But that is nonsense. What has she to do with it? Your affair is with the Earl, her father. Why do you speak of her?"

"Because there is only one door by which my father's friend can win his liberty. Let Georges Odin's son marry an Englishwoman and my Government will release him."

"That is your view. Do you forget his Excellency's influence? Why should he not petition the Government at Bukharest for this man's liberty?"

"Because, in that case, his own life would be in danger. We are a people that never forgets. I have told you so. If Georges Odin were at liberty, he would cross the world to find his enemy. That is our nature. We love and hate as an Eastern

people should. The man who does us a wrong must repay, whoever he is. It would be different if the young Count had an English wife. That is why I wish it."

Gavin smiled almost imperceptibly.

"It is quite clear that you know little of England," he said. "This language suits your own country very well. Permit me to say that it is ridiculous in ours. If Lord Melbourne had any hand in your friend's imprisonment, which I doubt, he is hardly likely to be influenced by threats. I should say that you are going the wrong way to work. As to the Lady Evelyn, I will tell you that she will never be the wife of one of your countrymen. If you ask a reason, it is a personal one, and before you now. She is going to marry me. It is just as well that we should understand as much at once."

The gypsy heard the news as one who had expected to hear it. He smoked for a little while in silence. Then he said:

"I appreciate the courtesy of your admission. That which I thought it necessary to tell you at first, I must now repeat . . . this lady is the betrothed of my friend, Count Odin. I remain in England as the guardian of his honor. If you are wise, you will leave the house without further warning. My friend is absent, and until he is here I must speak for him. We do not know you and wish you no harm. Let this affair end as it began. You would be foolish to do otherwise."

Gavin heard the threat without any sign of resentment whatever.

"You are talking the language of the Carpathians, not of London," he said, with a new note of determination in his tone. "I will answer you in my English way. I have asked Lady Evelyn to marry me, and she will do so before the year is out. That is final. For the rest, I remind you again that you are not in Bukharest."

He rose, laughing, and offered his hand.

"Good-night," he said. "They will be anxious about me at the Castle."

It was the gypsy's turn to smile.

"I have dealt fairly with you," he said; "for that which is now to come, do not blame me when it comes."

"Too late is often never," replied Gavin lightly; and with that he left him.

The gypsy girl, Djala, had ceased to sing as he quitted the tent and the rest of the encampment was in darkness. But as he crossed the home park, a burly figure upon a black horse loomed up suddenly from the shadows and there was still moonlight enough for him to recognize the Earl.

"He is going to his gypsy friends," Gavin said to himself. "Then he knows that this brigand's son has spoken to me—ah, I wonder!"

CHAPTER XXII

A SPY FROM BUKHAREST

It is an English characteristic to deride the Europe code of social ethics and especially those fine heroics which attended the vindication of what is so often miscalled "honor." Whatever else Gavin Ord lacked, sound common sense he had abundantly; and that came to his aid when he returned from the gypsy's tent to the Manor and debated the odd interview which he had so abruptly terminated. These men, he said, were mere bravadoes; but they might be dangerous none the less. Of Count Odin he knew nothing; but his antipathy to all counts was ineradicable, and he had come to number them together as so many impostors, valiants, and bankrupts. This habit of thinking first led him to the supposition that Lord Melbourne, his host, had been the victim of a little band of swindlers and was about to be blackmailed by them as few even of the most unfortunate degenerates are blackmailed, even in this age of accomplished roguery.

"It is a hundred to one old Georges Odin is dead," he argued; "this son of his got the story somehow and came over here to make what he could by it. The Earl has lost his nerve, and his love for Evelyn is betraying him into cowardice.

I shall see him and tell him the truth. If they fire off pistols at me, I must take my luck in my hand. There may be a deeper story—if so, I shall find it out when the time comes. I am now to act for Evelyn's sake and think of no consequences which do not concern her. Very well, I will begin to-morrow and the Earl is my first step. He shall hear everything. When he has done so, I shall know what to do."

He slept upon this, but it was a broken sleep whose interludes found him sitting up in bed listening for any sounds in the house, and repeating in spite of himself the gypsy threats. He could not forget that some one had watched him in his sleep when first he came to Melbourne Hall; and this unforgotten figure his imagination showed to him again, telling him that it crossed the room with cat-like steps or breathed upon his face whenever his eyes were closed. His natural courage made nothing of the darkness; but the suggestion of unknown and undisclosed danger became intolerable as the night advanced; and at the very first call of dawn, he drew the curtains back and waited with a child's longing for the day. When this at length broke above the night's mists floating up from the river, Gavin rose and put on his dressing-gown, being quite sure that sleep had, for the time being, deserted him. True, his odd hallucination that some one was in the room with him no longer troubled him; but certain facts disquieted him none the less; and of these, the belief that his wallet and his papers had been ransacked during the night was not the least alarming. He

felt sure that he could not be mistaken. A man of method, he remembered clearly how he had placed his papers and in what order he had left them. Whoever had played the spy's part had done so clumsily, forgetting to reclasp the wallet and leaving the dressing-table in some disorder. This troubled Gavin less than the knowledge that some one had, after all, watched him while he slept and that his dream had not deceived him. "They take me for a spy from Bukharest," he said . . . and he could laugh at the delusion.

It would have been about five o'clock of the morning by this time; a glorious hour, full of the sweet breath of day and of that sense of life and being which is the daydawn's gift. Gavin knew little of the habits of grooms, save that they were the people who were supposed to rise with the sun; but when an hour had passed he went out impatiently to the stables, and there the excellent William found him a "rare ould divil of a hoss" and one that "came just short of winnin' the National, to be sure he did." This raw-boned cantankerous brute carried him at a sound gallop twice round the home park; and, greatly refreshed, he returned to the Hall and asked the apologetic Griggs if the Earl were yet down. The answer that "his lordship was awaiting him in the Long Gallery," hardly surprised him. He felt sure that the recognition last night had been mutual.

"Zallony's son has told him," he said; "very well, I will go and ask him to give me Evelyn."

. . . . . .

The Earl sat at a little table placed in one of the embrasures of the Gallery. He had aged greatly these last few weeks, and there were lines upon his face that had not been there when Gavin first came to Moretown. A close observer would have said that the habit of sleep had long deserted him. This his eyes betrayed, being glassy in their abstracted gaze and rarely resting upon any object as though to observe it for more than an instant. When Gavin entered, a tremulous hand indicated a chair drawn up near by the table. The Earl was the first to speak and he did so with averted gaze and in a loud voice which failed to conceal the hesitation of his words.

"I hear of your unfortunate accident for the first time, Mr. Ord," he said slowly. "Let me implore you to run no more risks of the kind. The Belfry Tower is too old to write new histories."

Gavin replied with an immediate admission of that which he owed to Evelyn's bravery.

"But for your daughter, my lord," he said, "I should not be here this morning to speak to you of very grave things. Please do not think me insensible of your kindness if I mention that at once. I have asked Lady Evelyn to be my wife and she has given her consent. Naturally I tell you of this upon the first possible occasion. You know something of my story, or you would not have paid me the compliment of asking me here. I have an assured income of some two thousand a year, and, with your friendship, I should double it in as many years. That is a vulgar statement, but necessary. My father was Lord Justice

Ord, as you possibly knew; my dear mother is the daughter of Sir Francis Winnington, of Audley Court, Suffolk. These things, I know, must be talked about at such times, so please bear with me. I am sure that Evelyn would wish me to continue in the profession I have chosen; and, with your consent, I shall do so. There is nothing else I can tell you if it is not to say how very deeply I love your daughter and that I believe her love for me is not less."

The Earl heard him without remark. When he had finished he made no immediate response, seeming to lack words rather than decision.

"Mr. Ord," he said at length, "you had every right to speak to Evelyn. I make no complaint of it. But she cannot be your wife, for if she is not already the betrothed of another, there is at least an honorable understanding that she will make no marriage until he has been heard again. This affair must begin and end to-day. If I am no longer able to ask you to remain my guest here, you will understand my difficulty. I cannot answer you in any other way. For your sake I wish indeed that I could."

Gavin had fully expected this; but it did not disconcert him in any way. The battle which he must wage for Evelyn's sake had but begun. Settling himself in his chair and looking the Earl full in his face, he said:

"Does Lady Evelyn know of this, my lord? Is this the answer she wishes you to give me?"

"In no sense. But I speak as one who consults her interests before all things."

Gavin smiled perceptibly.

"Forgive me, Lord Melbourne," he said; "but all this is so very characteristic of your house and its history. A hundred years ago it would have sounded well enough and I should have called a coach obediently as any gentleman of those days would have felt obliged to do. But we live in the twentieth century, my lord, when men and women have learned the meaning of the word liberty . . . when the desires and schemes of other people——"

"Schemes, Mr. Ord——"

"No other word is possible. You do not desire the marriage for purely selfish reasons. I am not impertinent enough to inquire into them, but Evelyn has told me something, and the rest I deduce from the answer you have just given me. To save yourself, my lord, you would marry your daughter to a scoundrel, who is known for such in his own country and ours; and, when you did it, some false logic would try to tell you that it was for the sake of your home and name; while all the time it is done to save you some inconvenience, some penalty you should in justice pay to the past. I am not so blind that I cannot see the things which are happening all around me. Evelyn's consent to my proposal gives me this right to speak plainly to you, in her interests and my own. Would you not be wiser, my lord, to deal with me as I am dealing with you—to tell me in a word why this stranger can coerce you when an Englishman is answered in a word? I think that you would. I think it would be well if you said, 'Here is a man

who wishes to be my friend and will be so regardless of the consequences.' ''

The boldness of his utterance found the Earl altogether unarmed. Under other circumstances he would have wrung the bell and ordered a carriage for Mr. Gavin Ord; but the whole problem was too full of perplexities for that. It may be that Lord Melbourne was fully alive both to the truths and falsehoods of his position. He had done a man a great wrong and that man's son had crossed Europe to bid him right the wrong and act justly. How easy would it all have been if Evelyn had loved this son and married him! No story then to delight a scandal-loving multitude; no fear, growing upon weak nerves, that the man who had suffered might avenge his wrong. Yes, Evelyn could save him . . . and here was a stranger who forbade her to do so.

'' You speak very freely,'' he said to Gavin presently. '' I will do you the justice to believe that you also speak honestly. If Evelyn has told you anything, it will be that Count Odin is the son of one of my oldest friends.''

'' I have learned that from two sources,'' said Gavin. '' Will you let me add, my lord, that you are probably speaking of a man who is dead?''

The Earl started and looked up quickly.

'' Have you any knowledge of that? ''

'' None whatever, but I have heard of Count Odin's story.''

'' He is as other young men, I suppose; neither better nor worse——''

'' While, for the daughter you love, you would

have chosen just such a man. Is that so, my lord?"

Here was a shrewd hit, going straight to the heart of one who, for fifteen long years, had striven to shield his daughter from that which her dead mother's genius had bequeathed to her —the life and passion of the East; the nomad's craving for change and excitement; the gilt and tinsel of the theatre. Yes, truly, they had been years of self-sacrifice and of ceaseless vigil—to end in this spectre of youth reborn and of vengeance awake.

"Mr. Ord," he said, "I perceive that my story is known to you. Your judgment of me is what the world's judgment would be if half the truth were known—and, remember, it is rarely more than half a truth that the world comes to possess. I am acting, you say, not from a desire to do the best for my daughter, but to shield myself. It may be so, for men are blind enough when their own salvation is at stake. At the same time, there are reasons other than these, and such that you will hardly discover. I believe it is very necessary to Evelyn's happiness that this story shall be hushed up, for the time being at any rate. But I have made no promise to Count Odin other than those you know. If his father is still a prisoner in the mines at Yoliska, then I will do my best to obtain his liberty when I have assurances that such liberty will not be used to my disadvantage or to Evelyn's. I tell you upon my word as an Englishman that I am guiltless of such knowledge. When he fought with me in Buk-

harest, more than twenty years ago, I met him as a man of honor and nearly paid with my life for the folly. They now assert that my friends laid the complaint which induced the Roumanian Government to arrest him. I do not believe it to be true. Georges Odin, the records say, died in the fortress prison of Krajova nearly ten years ago. Prince Charles' Government arrested him, I admit, on the score of the duel he fought with me; but they had been trying to arrest him for many years, and that was their excuse. Of the rest I knew nothing. If he is dead——"

"My lord, have you taken no steps to ascertain the truth of his death?"

"My solicitors are now making all inquiries at Bukharest and Krajova."

"I should have thought that solicitors were scarcely the people to employ."

"Who else is to be trusted with such a story as this?"

"I am, Lord Melbourne."

"You—but you are a stranger to me and my house."

"A stranger who is willing to become a friend. Say that you will put no opposition in my way and I will begin my task at once."

"I appreciate your offer, but must decline it. Acceptance would imply an obligation I am unwilling to recognize."

"I ask for no recognition. To-night, my lord, I leave London for Bukharest. In a month or less I will return to tell you whether Georges Odin is alive or dead."

The Earl stared at him amazed.

"Bring me news of Georges Odin's death," he said, "and you shall marry my daughter."

Gavin rose and offered him his hand.

"I will start directly I have seen the Lady Evelyn," he said.

BOOK III

THE LIGHT

CHAPTER XXIII

BUKHAREST

"In America, my dear Gavin, they would certainly name you for a very prince of hustlers."

The speaker, a lad of twenty-two years of age, leaned back indolently in his chair and sipped a tiny cup of Turkish coffee with lazy satisfaction. Gifted with brown curly hair, ridiculously blue eyes, and a beardless chin, Cambridge had named him ironically "the Lamb." His name was Arthur Kenyon, and there had been no prettier athlete in all London when he was there, precisely ten days ago.

"Yes," he went on, "you lure me to this place, which might be half a mile at the most from the infernal regions, and promise me a ripping holiday. I come like a sheep to the shearing and what is my reward? Hours of self-contemplation —long musings upon an innocent past, and the thermometer at 112° Fahrenheit in the shade. Ye gods, what a thing to be a travelling Englishman!"

They sat in the restaurant of the Hotel Mos-

kowa at Bukharest, justly famous, as the English boy had said, for its historic prices and ancient meats, long matured. Gavin Ord, grown a little older since he left Derbyshire some fifteen days ago, had a map of Roumania before him and all his intentions appeared to be concentrated upon this. The restaurant, despite the season of the year, could show a fair array of pretty women in Vienna gowns and of little gold-laced officers who chaperoned them. The heat of the night had become intense and a great block of ice upon a marble pedestal melted visibly as though despairing of the effort to exist. Energy might have been deemed a forgotten art but for the frantic exertions of a typical gypsy band which fiddled as though its very salvation depended upon the marvels of its presto.

"My dear Arthur," said Gavin at length, folding up his map and lighting a cigarette with the air of one who is thinking of anything but a smoker's pleasure, "I am a beast, certainly. But, then, I am a successful beast."

"Do you mean to say that you have found him?"

"Good Master Indiscretion—I have found the house which Cook built and I am going to visit it to-morrow."

"Yes, yes, of course, that ancient and interesting Roman building . . . well, I always wanted to see Roumania, and, of course, we shall do Buda-Pesth going back. By the way, do you notice that acrobat playing the 'cello over there? Don't turn round yet. He's been watching you

ever since we sat down just as though he loved you dearly."

Gavin smoked for a little while without shifting his position in any way. Presently he said:

"I don't know why he should. Unless they watched me from London, which is not improbable, they are hardly likely to know of my arrival yet. When you have drunk your coffee, we'll go and take a turn on the Corso. The 'cellist certainly likes me. I see what you mean."

Half Bukharest seemed to have flocked to the Corso, or public park, by the time they arrived there. Even the innumerable gaming tables, which are the chief fame of the pretentious city, were deserted upon such a night as this; while the open-air cafés were so many illuminated ice-houses, thronged by perspiring civilians and equally perspiring soldiers, whose talk began and ended with an anathema upon the heat. Gavin Ord had travelled but little; his one real friend, Arthur Kenyon, had already been half across the world and back; but for both the interests of this strange scene, with its babble of excited tongues, its Hungarians, Servians, Bulgarians, Roumanians, and by no means least numerous, its sallow-faced Turks, were beyond any within their experience.

"No wonder the people at the Ministry tell you to be careful," said Kenyon amiably, as he pointed to a great Bashi-Bazouk whose very mustache might have been inflammable. "I would sooner meet a Chinese mandarin than that fellow anywhere. And there are plenty more of the

kind, you see. All sorts, shapes and sizes, ready to cut your throat for a golden coin any day you may be wanting the job done."

"All sham, my dear Arthur. Knives made in Birmingham and pistols in Germany! Don't worry your head about them. We start for Okna at seven o'clock to-morrow."

"Oh, you've found out where it is, then?"

"I wanted to tell you before dinner, but these fellows were listening. Cecil Chesny was at the Ministry to-day and he could not have done more for me. Okna means a stiff ride into the mountains and some hunting when we get there. If the old man, Georges Odin, is alive, he is at Okna. Our task is to persuade him that London is a healthier place——"

"And the son, this man they call the Count, what of him?"

"I can learn little. He has evidently been living on his wits for a long time. He was here a fortnight ago throwing promises to his creditors right and left. The local papers announce his engagement to Lord Melbourne's daughter—they spell it, "Sir Lord Milbawn," and declares that he is going up to buy the old Castle at Gravitza. I don't believe he is in Bukharest to-day—if he is, well, I must look out for myself, and you must help to look out for me. The rest depends upon his father. I could go back to England to-night and tell the Earl that Georges Odin was released four years ago from the mines at Prahova, but that would not help me. The Count would go back and blackmail them again

on the score of what his friends, the gypsies, meant to do. No, I shall bring the father if he is to be brought, and carry my purchase back to England. That's my plan, Arthur. Time will prove whether it's clever or foolish."

Arthur Kenyon listened as one listens to the tale of an Eastern romance. Gavin had told him the whole story before they left London; but here in Bukharest it seemed so much easier to comprehend, amid a people careless of life and little unacquainted with death. All the gauds of passion, of love, and hatred were known to this mean city. Here, at least, it did not appear difficult to understand how Count Odin, the adventurer, having heard the history of Robert Forrester's youth and of his present wealth, had set out for England determined to profit by his knowledge.

"We have no color in our roguery in London," Arthur said presently. "It's all just one drab tint—the same color as the yellow press that delights in it. Here one begins to understand why the fittest survive. You are a pretty plucky chap, Gavin, or you would not take it so easily——"

"Not for a woman's sake, Arthur?"

"Oh, well, I suppose if one is sufficiently in love, one would hack at Cerberus for a woman's sake. I am less fettered. Here in Bukharest I begin to wonder whether I shall die for the charming Lucy or the equally beautiful Lucinda. You have no doubts. My dear old fellow, I'm afraid you're in deadly earnest."

"So much in earnest, Arthur, that if I cannot

go back to make Evelyn my wife, I will never go back at all."

"Eros living in a dirty Roumanian hotel on ancient meats! No, by all the gods. But, tell me, does your friend Chesny think you are unwise to go to Okna?"

"He says I am mad. I told him as much as I had the right to tell. Odin, the son, is a swindler; but his gypsy friends are honest. They believe that an Englishman shut up one of their heroes for twenty years; and if they can find the man who did it, they will kill him. There's the Count's chance. I am going one better by offering to take his father to England to meet the man who wronged him and say that the vendetta is at an end. A mad scheme! Yes. Well, possibly, mad schemes are better than the others sometimes, and this may be the particular instance. I will tell you when we get to Okna, if ever we get there."

"Then you are plainly not an optimist."

"Hush—there's your old friend the 'cellist, going home it appears. A gypsy to the finger tips, Arthur. Let us talk of the weather!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRICE OF WISDOM

An Eastern sun, monstrous and molten and blinking tears of fire, dwelt an instant in the West ere it sank beneath the rim of the mountains, beyond which lies the river Danube. Instantly, as though by a wizard's enchantment, the heat spell passed from the face of the withered land and the sweetness of the night came down. All the woods were alive now, as though the voice of Even had bidden them rejoice. Birds appeared, flitting from the swaying boughs of oak and elm and sycamore. Springs bubbled over as though rejoicing that their enemy slept. Life that had been dormant but ten minutes ago answered to the réveillé of twilight and added a note musical to the song. Men breathed a full breath of the soft breezes and said that it was good to live. The very landscape, revealing new beauties in the mellow light, might have been sensible of the hour and its meaning.

It was the evening of the second day after Gavin Ord and his friend Arthur Kenyon had dined together in the Hotel Moskowa at Bukharest. A railway and twelve hours' abuse of its tardiness had carried them a stage upon this journey. Willing Hungarian ponies, mules, in whose eyes the negative virtues might be read, brought them to

the foot of the mountains and left them there to camp with what luxury they might. Attended by a sleek Turk they had discovered in the Capital, their escort boasted no less than four heroes of the line—for this had been Cecil Chesny's unalterable determination, that they should not go to the mountains alone.

"It's a fool's errand and may be dangerous," said he; "these soldiers are thieves, but they will see that no one else robs you. I will ask the Ministry to pick out as good specimens as he can. Don't complain when you see them. They are much less harmless than they look."

Gavin did not like the business at all, but as Chesny's good-will was necessary to the expedition, he put up with it, and the four shabby soldiers accompanied him from Bukharest. They were ill-mannered fellows enough, raw-boned, high-cheeked, sallow-faced ruffians, whose "paradise enow" could be found wherever good comely, plump girls and bad tobacco might be found. Their energy at meal-times became truly prodigious. They were as ravenous wolves, seeking what they might devour; and, as Arthur Kenyon remarked, they would have eaten his boots if he had taken them off.

Now, this pretty company, Englishmen, Roumanians, a Greek and a Turk, encamped in the woods together upon the evening of the second day, and found what comfort they could beneath the sheltering leaves of a spacious beech. It had been Gavin's intention to put up at a guest-house named by the guide-book he had purchased in

Vienna; but when they came to the place where the inn should have stood, they discovered nothing but charred ruins and cinerous relics; and, "by all the gods," said Arthur Kenyon, "the red cock has crowed here before us." A romantic ear would have listened greedily at such a time to the guide's tales of border pleasantries—girls carried shrieking to the mountains, roofs blazing, priests burned in their holy oils, babes hoist on bayonets—for such they would have made a simple affair in which a drunken herdsman and a paraffin lamp had figured notably; but Gavin was in no mood for narratives, and he sent them to the right about, one for wood, another for water, a third to hunt a cot or homestead, if such were to be discovered.

"The Hotel of the Belle Étoile after all," he said gloomily; "well, it might have been worse, Arthur."

"Just so. If I had not stocked your larder at Slavitesti, you would now be doing what the amiable Foulon advised the French people to do a hundred years ago—eating hay with relish, my dear boy. Well, there's red wine strong enough to poison White Bull, and maize bread tough enough for a guinea set of ready-made grinders, to say nothing of cheese, sausage, and biscuits. Fall on, Macduff, and damned be he who eats enough!"

"I don't care twopence about the food," said Gavin savagely; "it's the delay I fret over. We may be within riding distance of the place for all I know. They could have told us at this inn."

"The boy on the burning deck grown eloquent. We might have put out the fire for them or comforted some of the ladies. Are you really in such a hurry, Gavin?"

"Judge for yourself. From the Castle at Okna I can write to Evelyn and tell her the truth. Until it is told, she will be the daily victim of a rogue's plausible suggestions. Why, the man may have returned to Derbyshire by this time—all that is possible and more."

"And there was a great square moon in the sky and thereon the people read the story of the Jaberwock. Tell me frankly, would Evelyn listen to the man now?"

"Evelyn would not, but Etta Romney might. Enigmas—I shall not explain them. Let us go to supper. The day will come after the centuries."

"Gavin, my dear fellow—this is the ancient fever. I bow to it. Pass the wine and I'll drink to your enigma. We are people of importance and our escort is a royal one. It is also musical. That song suggests Seigfried or is it the 'Belle of New York'? My musical education was completed at Magdalen College within Cambridge and is incomplete."

He frivolled on as young men will, not without purpose, for Gavin's anxiety was potent to all about him. It had seemed an easy thing in England to visit the near East and learn for himself the simple truth of Georges Odin's fate. Here on the slopes of the mountains he began to understand his difficulties, perhaps the danger, of his pursuit. For this, he remembered, had been the

scene of Robert Forrester's youth, this the home of Zallony, the revolutionary brigand upon whose head three countries had set a price. Time had not changed the disposition of the mountain people, nor had civilization influenced its social creeds. Beware of Zallony's gypsies, they had said to him at Bukharest. This night had brought him within a post of his goal. It would be hard enough if any mischance should send him back to England empty-handed; to say to Evelyn, "I have failed; I can tell you nothing."

Arthur Kenyon, for his part, had begun to enjoy the whole adventure amazingly. Especially he liked the four merry soldiers who ate and drank as though they had been fasting and athirst for a week, and lay down afterwards to fall instantly to sleep. In this the Greek muleteer and the Turkish robber of all trades imitated them without loss of time; so that by nine o'clock nothing but the red glow of two English pipes and the sonorous nasal thank-offerings of the sleepers would have betrayed the camp or its occupants. Such conversation as passed between Gavin and Arthur was in fitful whispers, the talk of men thoroughly fatigued and wistful for the day. They, too, dropped to sleep over it at last, and when they awoke it was to such a scene as neither would ever forget, however long he might live.

Gavin slept without dreaming, the first night he had done so since he left England. He could remember afterwards that his friend's voice awoke him from his heavy slumber; and that, when he sat up and stared about him, Arthur Ken-

yon was the first person his eyes rested upon. Instantaneously, as one sees a picture in a vision, the scene of the camp presented itself to his view —the great trunks of the oaks and beeches, the hollow, wherein the horses were tethered, the tangle of grass and undergrowth. Just as he had seen it when he fell asleep, so the reddening embers of the camp-fire showed it to him now—unchanged, and yet how different! He was, for this brief instant, as a sleeper who wakes in a familiar room and wonders why he has been awakened. Then, just as rapidly, the scales fell from his eyes and he knew.

Arthur Kenyon stood with his back against the trunk of a beech, his revolver drawn and about him such a motley crowd that only a comic opera could have reproduced it. Gypsies chiefly, the fire-light flashed upon sallow faces which a man might see in an evil dream; upon arms that a mediæval age should have forged; upon limbs that forest labor had trained to hardiness. Crying together in not unmusical exclamations, the raiders appeared in no way desirous of injuring their man, but only of disarming him. One of their number lay prone already, hugging a wounded thigh and muttering imprecations which should have brought the heavens upon his head—a second had the Englishman by the legs and would not be beaten off; while of the rest, the foremost aimed heavy blows at the extended pistol and demanded its delivery in sonorous German. Such was the scene which the picture presented to Gavin as

he awoke. He was on his feet before the full meaning of it could be comprehended.

"Halt!" he cried, for lack of any other word to serve. His tone, his manner, drew all eyes toward him. "What do you want?" he continued, with the same air of authority. Twenty voices answered him, but he could make nothing of their reply. He was about to speak for the third time when rough hands pinioned his arms and feet from behind and instantly deprived him of the power to move a step from the place where he stood.

"To conduct your excellency to the Castle of Okna—we have come for that, excellency."

"You are aware that I am an Englishman?"

The gypsy pointed smilingly to his wounded friend.

"We are perfectly aware of it, excellency."

"Then you know the consequences of that which you are doing?"

"Pardon, excellency—there are no consequences in the mountains. Let your friend be wise and put up his pistol. We shall shoot him if he does not."

Gavin, doubting the nature of the situation no longer, shrugged his shoulders and invited Kenyon by a gesture to put up his pistol.

"We can do nothing, Arthur, let them have their way."

"I beg your pardon, Gavin; I could make holes in two or three of them."

"It would not help us. They are evidently only agents. Let's hear what the principal has to say."

"Very well, if you think so. It's poor fun, though—almost like shooting sheep in the Highlands. But, of course, I bow to wisdom."

He held out his hands to the gypsy who bound them immediately with a leather thong taken from the saddle-bow of the excellent pony he had ridden. Silently and methodically now, the men secured their prisoners and produced their gyves of heavy rope. To resist would have been just that madness which Gavin named it—and but for Evelyn the scene had been one to jest at.

"Do you treat all your guests at the Castle of Okna in this way?" he asked the leader of the men suddenly.

The reply was delivered with a suavity delightful to hear.

"When they come to us with soldiers and Turks, then we speak plainly to them, excellency."

"True, I had forgotten the soldiers. Where are those noble men now?"

"Half-way back to Slavitesti, excellency."

"And the muleteer?"

"Oh, my friends are warming his feet for him. We are not fond of Greeks, here in the mountains, excellency."

Gavin started as the man spoke, for a wild shriek broke upon his ears and becoming louder until it sounded like some supreme cry of human agony, ended at last in a fearful sobbing, as it were the weeping of a child in pain. When he dared to look, he saw the gypsies had dragged the wretched Greek to the camp-fire and pouring oil from a can upon his bare feet, they thrust them into the

flames and held them there with that utter indifference to human suffering which, above all others, is the characteristic of the people of the Balkans. Worming in their embrace, his eyes starting from his head, his voice paralyzed by the fearful cries he raised, the wretched man suddenly fainted and lay inanimate in the flame. Then, and not until then, they drew him back and left him quivering upon the green grass.

"He was warned," the gypsy leader muttered sullenly; "he should have known better."

But Arthur, showing Gavin his bleeding wrists, said with a shrug.

"I think very little of wisdom, Gavin."

The rope had cut the flesh almost to the bone in his efforts to go to the help of the wretched Greek.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOUSE ABOVE THE TORRENT

Some one upon the outskirts of the wood whistled softly and the gypsies stood with ears intent listening, alarmed, to the signal. When it had been twice repeated, they appeared to become more confident, and, untethering their ponies, or calling, with low, whining voices, those that grazed, they turned to their prisoners and bade them prepare to march.

"To the Castle of Okna, excellency——"

A shout of laughter greeted the saying, and Gavin, had he been credulous until this time, would have remained credulous no more. A philosopher always, he shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the ropes which bound him.

"I am no acrobat," he said; "I cannot ride with a rope about my legs."

"We are about to remove it, excellency. Be careful what you do—my men are hasty. If you are wise, you will be followed by so many laughing angels. If, however, we should find you obstinate, then, excellency——"

He touched the handle of a great knife at his girdle significantly, and some of the others, as though understanding him, closed about the pony significantly while Gavin mounted. A similar at-

tention being paid to Arthur Kenyon was not received so kindly; for no sooner did they attempt to lift him roughly to the saddle than he turned about and dealt the first of them a rousing blow which stretched the fellow full length upon the grass and left him insensible there. The act was within an ace of costing him his life. Knives sprung from sheathes, antique pistols were flourished—there were cries and counter-cries; and then, as though miraculously, a louder voice from some one hidden in the wood commanding them to silence. In that moment, the gypsy chief flung himself before Kenyon and protected him with hands uplifted and curses on his lips.

"Dogs and carrion—do you forget whom you obey?" he almost shrieked, and then to the Englishman, "You are mad, *mein herr*—be wise or I will kill you."

Kenyon, strangely nonchalant through it all, shrugged his shoulders and clambered upon the back of the pony. Gavin turned deadly pale in spite of himself, breathed a full breath again, and desired nothing more of fate than that they should quit the cursed wood without further loss of time. As though enough evil had not come to him there, he espied, as they rode from the place, the dead body of his servant, the Turk, face downwards with the knife that killed him still protruding from his shoulders. And he doubted if the wretched Greek, so brutally maimed in the fire, still lived or must be numbered a second victim of the night.

Had he been a fool to leave England upon such

an errand at all, or did the circumstances of his visit justify him? Of this he did not believe that he was the best judge. That which he had done had been done for the sake of one whose sweet voice seemed to speak of courage even at such an hour—Evelyn, the woman who first had taught him what man's love could be; whose fair image went with him as he rode, the stately figure of his dreams, the gentle Evelyn for whom the supreme adoration and pity of his life were reserved. If ignominy were his ultimate reward, he cared nothing—no danger, no peril of the way, must be set against the happiness, nay, the very soul's salvation, of her who had said to him, "I love you!"

This had been the whole spirit of his journey, and it did not desert him now when the gypsies set out upon the mountain road and he understood that he was a helpless hostage in their hands. As for Arthur Kenyon, he, with English stolidity, still chose to regard the whole scene as a jest and to comment upon it from such a standpoint. To him the picturesque environment of height and valley, forests of pine and sleeping pastures, were less than nothing at all. He did not care a blade of grass for the first roseate glow of dawn in the Eastern sky; for the shimmer of gold upon the majestic landscape, or the jewels sprayed by the stream below them. He had met an adventure and he gloried in it. Begging a cigarette from the nearest gypsy, he thanked the fellow for a light, and so fell to the thirty words of German bequeathed to him by that splendid foundation of

one William at Winchester. There were "havenzie's" and "Ich Wimsche's" enough to have served a threepenny manual of traveller's talk here. Neither understood the other and each was happy.

"The man's a born idiot," Arthur said to Gavin at last. "I ask him where the road leads to and he says 'half-an-hour.'"

"Meaning we are half-an-hour from our destination."

"Then why the deuce can't he say so in plain English?"

"He might ask you why the deuce you can't ask him in plain Hungarian."

"That's so—but how these fellows don't break their jaws over this gabble, I can't make out. Well, I suppose we shall get breakfast somewhere, Gavin."

"Are you hungry, Arthur?"

"Not much; I'm thinking of that poor devil of a Greek."

"Yes, they are brutes enough. What could we do?"

"Oh, I knew that! What I am hoping is that they will get it hot after we have told the tale at Bukharest. The authorities——"

"Authorities, in the Balkans, Arthur! Do you forget our escort?"

"Oh, those blackguards. They ought to enter for the mile championship at the L. A. C. In the matter of running, they are a glory to their country."

"They will tell some cock-and-bull story and

make it out that we dismissed them. Chesny told me not to put too much reliance upon them. Well, they're no loss. We can see it through without them."

"Good old pronoun. Would you define that 'it' for my benefit?"

"Oh, there I'm beaten. We are going up a mountain and may go down again. That's evident. Two Jacks and no Jills to speak of. There's a house also, I perceive—across the torrent yonder. That must have been built when the witches were young. The flat tiles speak of Julius Cæsar, don't they? I wonder if they know we're coming?"

"We might have cabled 'coffee and the nearest approach to cold grouse.' Do you like cold grouse for breakfast, Gavin? There's nothing to beat it on the list, to my way of thinking. Cold grouse and nice, crisp, hot toast. Some Cambridge squash afterwards, and then a great big round pipe. That's what you think of when you've been ten hours in the saddle and can't find an inn. I wish I could discern it now, as the curate says."

Gavin smiled, but his gaze was set upon the ancient ruin his quick eye had observed upon a height of the green mountain above them. He wondered if the path would carry them by it, or pierce the hills and leave the castle, for such it plainly had been, upon their left hands. But for the circumstances in which he approached it, the scene had been wild and strange enough to have awakened all an artist's dormant capacities for admiration. They were well above the pine woods

by this time and could look back upon a fertile valley, exquisitely green, and bordered by shining rivers. Villages, churches, farms were so many dolls' houses planted upon mighty fields while midget beasts awakened to the day. The bridle-track itself wound about a considerable mountain whose slopes were glorious with heather and mountain ash; there were other peaks beyond, rising in a crescendo of grandeur to the distant vista of the eternal snows, where the gods of solitude had been enthroned and melancholy uplifted an icy sceptre.

Gavin could not but be sensible of the majesty of this scene; nor did he find the old castle out of harmony with its beauties. The building, which he now perceived that they were approaching, had been built in a cleft of the hills, at a point where the torrent fell in a thunder of silver spray to a deep blue pool far down in the valley below. Clinging, as it were, to the very face of a precipitous cliff, a drawbridge spanned the torrent and gave access to the mountain road upon the further side of the pass; but so narrow was the river and so perpendicular the rocks that it seemed as though men might clasp hands across the abyss or a good horse take it in the stride of a gallop. For the rest, the black frowning walls, the iron-sheathed doors, the plut-houses, the barbicon, the quaint turrets thrust out here and there above the chasm, spoke of many centuries and many arts—here of Saracen, there of Turk, of the reign of the rounded arch, and even of glorious Gothic. A building to study, Gavin said, to

scan with well-schooled eyes from some opposing height, whence every phase of its changing wonders might be justly estimated by him who would learn and imitate. Even his own predicament was forgotten when his guides stopped upon its threshold and demanded in loud tones that the drawbridge should be let down.

"This is the place, by Mahomet," said Arthur dryly . . . and he added, "What a devil of a house for a week-end!".

Gavin bade him listen. A voice across the chasm replied to the gypsy hail.

"Don't you recognize that?" he asked; "it's the voice we heard in the wood."

"When this crowd desired to agitate my heirs, executors and assigns? You're right for a ransom. I wonder if they'll introduce us."

"We shall soon know. Here's the bridge coming down. What have you done with your armor, Arthur?"

"Left it in the cab, perhaps—don't speak, that ancient person yonder engrosses me. I wonder what Tree would pay for the loan of his make-up."

"I'll put the question when I return. This evidently is where we get down. Well, I'm glad of that anyhow."

It was as he said. The cavalcade had come to its journey's end; and there, picturesquely grouped upon the narrow road, were men and mules and mountain ponies, giving more than a welcome splash of color to the neighboring monotony of rock and shrub, and right glad all to be once more at their ease. It now became plain that

none but the gypsy leader was to enter the Castle with the prisoners; and he, when he had addressed some loud words to the others (for the roar of the torrent compelled him to shout), passed first across the bridge, leading Kenyon's pony and calling to the other to follow him. Just a glance the men could turn upon raging waters, here of the deepest blue, there a sour green, or again but a boiling, tumbling mass of writhing foam—just this and the vista of the sheer, cruel rocks and the infernal abyss; then they passed over and the bridge was drawn up and they stood within the courtyard, as securely caged as though the oubliettes prisoned them and gyves of steel were about their wrists.

"Excellents, my master, the Chevalier, would speak with you."

Thus said the guide—and, as he said it, Gavin understood that he had come to the house of Count Odin's father, the man who had loved Dora d'Istran, and for love of her had paid nearly twenty years of his precious liberty.

"And this is the Castle of Okna?" he exclaimed.

The guide smiled.

"No, excellency," he said, "the Castle of Okna lies many miles from here. You must speak to our master of that. That is his step, excellency!"

They listened and heard the tapping of a stick upon a stone pavement. It approached them laboriously; and after that which seemed an interminable interval, an old white-haired man appeared at one of the doors of the quadrangle and

raising his voice bade them welcome. The voice was the one they recognized as that of the wood; but the face of the speaker sent a shudder through Gavin's veins which left him unashamed.

"Blind," he muttered, amazed—"the man is blind."

CHAPTER XXVI

THROUGH A WOMAN'S HEART

The blind man felt his way down a short flight of stairs, and, standing before the prisoners, he said in a voice indescribably harsh and grating:

"Gentlemen, welcome to Setchevo," and so he told them the name of the place to which their journey had carried them.

A man of middle stature, slightly bent, his face pitted and scarred revoltingly, his fine white hair combed down with scrupulous vanity upon his shoulders, the eyes, nevertheless, remained supreme in their power to repel and to dominate. Sightless, they seemed to search the very heart of him who braved them. Look where they might, the Englishmen's gaze came back at last to those unforgettable eyes. The horror of them was indescribable.

"Welcome to Setchevo, gentlemen. I am the Chevalier Georges Odin. Yes, I have heard of you and am glad to see you. Please to say which of you is Mr. Gavin Ord."

Gavin stepped forward and answered in a loud, courageous voice, "I am he." The blind man, passing trembling claws over the hands and faces of the two, smiled when he heard the voice and drew still nearer to them.

"You came from England to see me," he said; "you bring me news from my son and his English wife."

This was a thing to startle them. Did he, then, believe that Count Odin, his son, had already married the Lady Evelyn, or was it but a *coup de theatre* to invite them to an indiscretion. Gavin, shrewd and watchful, decided in an instant upon the course he would take.

"I bring no message from your son; nor has he, to my knowledge, an English wife. Permit me an interview where we can be alone and I will state my business freely. Your method of bringing us here, Chevalier, may be characteristic of the Balkans; but I do not think it will be understood by my English friends in Bukharest. You will be wise to remember that at the outset."

Here was a threat and a wise threat; but the old man heard it with disdain, his tongue licking his lips and a smile, vicious and cruel, upon his scarred face.

"My friend," he said, "at the donjon of Setchevo we think nothing of English opinion at Bukharest, as you will learn in good time. I thank you, however, for reminding me that you are my guests and fasting. Be good enough to follow me. The English, I remember, are eaters of flesh at dawn, being thus but one step removed from the cannibals. This house shall gratify you—please to follow me, I say."

Laboriously as he had descended the stairs, he climbed them again, the baffling smile still upon his face and the stick tapping weirdly upon the

broken stone. The house within did not belie the house as it appeared from without. Arched corridors, cracked groins, moulded frescoes, great bare apartments with dismal furniture of brown oak, the whole building breathed a breath both chilling and pestilential. If there were a redeeming feature, Gavin found it in the so-called Banqueting Hall, a fine room gracefully panelled with a barrel vault and some antique mouldings original enough to awaken an artist's curiosity. The great buffet of this boasted plate was of considerable value and no little merit of design; and such a breakfast as the Chevalier's servants had prepared was served upon a mighty oak table which had been a table when the second Mohammed ravaged Bosnia.

The men were hungry enough and they ate and drank with good appetite. Perhaps it was with some relief that they discovered a greater leniency within the house than they had found without. Discomfort is often the ally of fear; and whatever were the demerits of the House at Setchevo, the discomforts were relatively trifling. As for the old blind Chevalier, he sat at the head of the table just as though he had eyes to watch their every movement and to judge them thereby. Not until they had made a good meal of delicious coffee and fine white bread, with eggs and a dish of Kolesha in a stiff square lump from the pan—not until then did he intrude with a word, or appear in any way anxious to question them.

"You pay a tribute to our mountain air," he exclaimed at last, speaking a little to their aston-

ishment in their own tongue; "that is your English virtue, you can eat at any time."

"And some of us are equally useful in the matter of drinking," rejoined Arthur Kenyon, who had begun to enjoy himself again, and was delighted to hear the English language.

The Chevalier, however, believed this to be some reflection upon his hospitality, and he said at once:

"I compliment you upon your frankness, *mein herr*—my servants shall bring wine."

"Oh, indeed, no, I referred to a very bad habit," exclaimed Kenyon quickly and then rising, he added, "With your permission, sir, I will leave you with my friend. I am sure you have both much to say to each other."

He did not wait for a reply but strolled off to the other end of the hall and thence out to the courtyard, no man saying him nay. Alone together, the Chevalier and Gavin sat a few moments in awkward silence, each debating the phrase with which he should open the argument. Meanwhile, a Turkish servant brought cigarettes, and the old man lighted one but immediately cast it from him.

"The blind cannot smoke," he said irritably; "that is one of the compensations of life which imagination cannot give us. Well, I am too old to complain—my world lies within these walls. It is wide enough for me."

"I am indeed sorry," said Gavin, for suffering could always arouse his sympathies wherever he found it. "Is there no hope at all of any relief?"

"None whatever. The nerves have perished. So much I owe to my English friendship—the last gift it bestowed upon me. Shall I tell you by what means I became blind, *mein herr?* Go down to the salt mines at Okna and when they blast the rock there, you will say, 'Georges Odin, the Englishman's friend, lost his eyesight in that mine.' It is true before God. And the man who put this calamity upon me—what of him? A rich man, *mein herr*, honored by the world, a great noble in his own country, a leader of the people, the possessor of much land and many houses. He sent me to Okna. We were boys together on the hills. If he shamed me in the race for all that young men seek of life, I suffered it because of my friendship. Then the night fell upon me—you know the story. He took from me the woman I loved. We met as men of honor should. I avenged the wrong—my God, what a vengeance with the Russian hounds upon my track and the fortress prison already garnished for me! *Mein herr*, you knew of this story or you would not have come to my house. Tell me what I shall add to it, for I listen patiently."

He was a fine old actor and the melodramatic gesture with which he accompanied the recital would have made a deep impression upon one less given to cool analysis and reticent common sense than Gavin Ord. Gavin, indeed, had thought upon this strange history almost night and day since Lord Melbourne had first related it. If he had come to have a settled opinion upon it all, nothing that had yet transpired upon his journey from

England altered that opinion or even modified it. This blind man he believed to have been the victim of the Russian Government. Lord Melbourne had acted treacherously in making no attempt to release his old rival from the mines; but had he so attempted, his efforts must have been futile—for the Russians believed that Georges Odin was their most relentless enemy and had pursued him with bitter and lasting animosity. So the affair stood in Gavin's mind—nor was he influenced in any way by the forensic appeal now addressed to him.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I know your story, Chevalier, and I am here because of it. Let me say in a word that I come because Lord Melbourne is anxious and ready, in so far as it is possible to do so, to atone for any wrong he may have done you. He desires nothing so much as that you two, who were friends in boyhood, should be reconciled now when years must be remembered and the accidents of life be provided for. So he sends me to Bukharest to invite you to England, there to hear him for himself and to tell him how best he may serve you. I can add nothing to that invitation save my own belief in his honesty, and in the reality of those motives which now actuate him. If you decide to accompany me to England——"

An exclamation which was half an oath arrested him suddenly and he became aware that he was no longer heard patiently. In truth, the native temper of his race mastered Georges Odin in that moment and left him with no remembrance but that of the wretchedness of his own life and the

depth of the passions which had contributed to it.

"Money!" he cried angrily, "this man offers me money!"

"Indeed, no—he offers you friendship."

"Tell me the truth! He is afraid of me. Yes, there was always a coward's cloak ready for him. He knew it and played his part in spite of it. He is afraid of me and sends you here to say so. My friend, that man shall yet fall on his knees before me. He shall beg mercy, not for himself but for another. When his daughter—God be thanked he has a daughter—when his daughter is my daughter—ha! we can reach many hearts through the hearts of the women they love. As he did to me, so will I do to this English girl he dotes upon. When she is my son's wife!"

His laugh had a horrid ring in it—broken, stunted teeth protruded from his hanging lips, his hands trembled upon the stick he carried. "When she is my son's wife!" He seemed to moisten the very words with a tongue lustful for vengeance. And Gavin heard him with a repulsion beyond all experience, a horror that made him dread the very touch of such a man's fingers.

"Chevalier," he said at length, "the Lady Evelyn will never be your son's wife."

"Ha, a prophet? Tell me that you are her chosen husband, and I will ask you no second question."

"I am her chosen husband and I return to England to marry her."

"You return! *Mein herr*, am I a madman that I should open my gates to one who does not even

"As you came in folly, so shall you go — when the English woman is in my son's arms." Chap. 26.

know how to hold his tongue? Shall I send you back to rob my son of the rewards of his fidelity? Return you shall—when she is his wife. Until that time, mein herr, consider yourself my guest."

He rose defiantly, brandishing his stick.

"Fool," he cried; "fool to dare the mountains which Zallony rules. As you came in folly, so shall you go—when the Englishwoman is in my son's arms."

He turned, a laugh which was almost a cry upon his lips, and tapped his way from the apartment. Gavin could hear the sound of his footsteps long afterwards, passing from corridor to corridor of the great bare house; but the words he had spoken lingered and were echoed, as though by a spirit of vengeance moving in the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

ETTA ROMNEY'S RETURN

It would have been about half-past one upon the afternoon of a gloomy November day, some three months after Gavin Ord set out for Roumania, that a hansom cab was driven up to the stage-door of the Carlton Theatre, the Lady Evelyn, wearing heavy black furs and a motor veil, which entirely hid her face from the passers-by, alighted timidly and offered the cabman a generous fare. Deaf to the man's effusive assurance that he had no other ambition in life but to drive the same fare back to the place whence she came, Evelyn entered the narrow alley wherein the stage-door is situated and at once asked the stage-door keeper if Mr. Charles Izard was or was not within the house? The simple question provoked an answer that might have satisfied a diplomatist but helped Evelyn not at all.

"Maybe he is, maybe he ain't. It depends on who wants him. Now, you take a word from me, miss. Say to yourself, Shall I go and have dinner with the Prince of Wales this afternoon or shall I not? That'll answer you and leave old Jacob Briggs to finish his pipe in peace, he being the father of widows, likewise of orphans."

Jacob, it was plain, had but just lunched and

was more affable than upon any less benign occasion. He sat with his back to a bill which announced the concluding nights of that dismal play "Oliver Cromwell—a comedy, by Rowland Wales," and he smoked a pipe with that which the ancient Weller would have called an "uncommon power of suction." Here, said he, is another of 'em, meaning thereby another candidate for histrionic honors which twenty-five shillings a week should reward. Jacob knew how to deal with them; "but," said he, "when I've got my dinner in me then I'm a blessed lamb." So he addressed Evelyn "humorous-like" and did not lose his patience even when she would not go away.

"I must see Mr. Izard to-day. I am sure he will wish to see me. If you would take my name into the theatre——"

Jacob Briggs, pulling the pipe to the right side of his mouth, ate a smile as though it were good butter.

"Perhaps he was agoing to send a carriage and pair for yer, miss, or a motor kar. That's wot he does ordinary to such young ladies as you. Now, I shouldn't wonder if you don't think as you can play Miss Fay's part better'n she herself. I've seed a many and most of 'em do. But, lord, I'm too good-natured to take much notice on it. Tryin's tryin', says I, and if you ask for a sufferin (sovereign), who knows as you mayn't get a shilling. Wot you've got to do, miss, is to go round to the horfiss. They'll soon turn you out of that, and better for you in the long run——"

"And yet you used not to think so when I was playing Di Vernon, Mr. Briggs."

The smile left Jacob's face as though some one had hit him. He slipped down the board until he came near to sitting on the pavement. Speech did not immediately assist him, and he could mutter nothing else but the mystic and entirely irrelevant phrase, "D—n my uncle!" which he continued to repeat until he had scrambled to his feet and doffed his carpenter's cap.

"Good Lord, Miss Romney, if you'd have said so, why, I'd have pulled the theatre down for ye, and willing. Mr. Izard now—he won't be glad neither. 'Briggs,' says he to me, 'she'll come back some day just as sure as Mrs. Briggs'—but that's neither here nor there, miss. He's over at the tavern now and Mr. Lacombe with him. Let me say the word and he'll come back in a fire-engine——"

Evelyn protested that she did not desire the word to be said; but would wait in the auditorium and announce herself to the great man. Understanding that the "tavern" really meant the Carlton Hotel and that there was a rehearsal of a new and modern play at two o'clock, she entered the theatre and sat, her veil undrawn, in the wings, whereby from time to time the acquaintances of old time must pass her. So dark was it that she feared no recognition. Those who came in and out, pinched girls who had lunched off a sponge-cake and a cup of cocoa; heavy-jowled men whose mid-day refreshment had been distilled from juniper; sleek youths with a new rendering of Hamlet

in their pockets—the success, the fortunes, the hopes, the disappointments of each chained his tongue and directed his eyes to that man or woman alone who had the patience and the good-nature to hear a recital of them. None paid attention to Evelyn, or as much as remarked her presence in the sombre light. Even little Dulcie Holmes passed her by unnoticed; and as for the melancholy Lucy Grey, she was too full of her own troubles so much as to think of anyone else's. "I wish I were dead," she had just said to Dulcie—and this was as much as to say, "I have no part in the new play, and God knows how I shall pay for my lodging."

Evelyn had a little difficulty in restraining herself from declaring her identity to the girls; but an incurable love of dramatic effect came to her aid and, perhaps, the vain desire to be discovered more worthily by that great man, Mr. Charles Izard. Aware that she was waiting there as the humblest suppliant for the theatre's favors, she perceived presently that the iron door between stage and auditorium stood open; and, slipping through, she entered a stage-box and there waited in better security. One by one now the "stars" entered the theatre and took up their positions upon the dimly-lighted stage. A chatter of conversation arose, amidst which the stage-manager's voice could be heard in heated argument with a lady whose part had been cut. All waited for the great man; and when he appeared a hush fell as though upon a transformation scene in a country panto-

mime. Lo, he had come—fresh from a long cigar and a bottle of what he called " noots "—meaning the excellent wine of Burgundy known as Nints. What bustle, what activity upon the part of the underlings now! How busy the principals appear to be! How white in the gloom are the faces of the girls, who lately spoke of fortune and furs and a furore of applause!

The new play was also a new entertainment. It appeared to Evelyn to be a hash-up of drama and ballet, with a comedy scene in each act, introduced for the sole purpose of exploiting a lady who could imitate wild animals. That it might succeed in an age which has almost forgotten the bombastics of the ancient drama, and cares not a straw what an entertainment may be called so long as it is amusing and provokes a rhythmical nodding of heads, was very probable. Mr. Izard, at least, had few doubts about the success of it; and yet he could have wished it otherwise. " They ask me to elevate the people," he would remark in confidential moments—" why, sir, the people that want elevating had better go up in elevators. I'm here to run a theatre, not a Tower of Babel, and that's so. Just walk round to some of these fine-mouthed folk and ask them what they will pay down in dollars for the good of humanity and the British stage. If you can buy a ten-cent collar with the proceeds of that hat-box, I'll set a stone up to your memory. No, sir, the world's too tired to think. Give 'em a great actress and they don't have to think. That's what I'm looking for, like a man who's dropped a thousand-

dollar scarf-pin on the beach at Atlantic City. Since Etta Romney walked out—but what's the good of talking about that? When she comes back I'll begin to think about the people's good health again. Sir, she made the rest of them look like thirty cents, and that's gospel truth."

The confession would end with a sigh and a new application to the business of tragic-burlesque-comedy. Smarting from the pink lash of a half-penny evening paper, which had, in a leading article that afternoon, cast italicized reflections upon "the porcine Paladius of the people's palaces," the great man was in no very pleasant mood; and this he made manifest directly rehearsal began. Scarcely a dozen lines had been repeated before the leading lady was in tears and the old stock actor sulking at a public-house round the corner. Ladies at twenty-three shillings a week heard themselves addressed in terms which implied their fitness for the position of dummies in a side-show. The stage-manager would infallibly have been visited with blindness if the great man's appeals to unknown powers had been heard. When calm fell, Izard settled himself frettingly in a stall and there simmered a long while in silence. Not for half an hour did an exclamation escape him, and then it came almost involuntarily. He seemed to be waging a battle between his contempt for the leading lady and his fear that she would walk out of the house; and the latter being worsted, he cried aloud, almost like one in despair:

"Etta Romney—Etta Romney—what, in God's name, keeps you out of my theatre!"

A dead silence fell. Everyone was awed by the real pathos of this regret, drawn from a man who had never been the servant of a sentiment. And when a musical voice answered him from the stage-box, opposite prompt, then, indeed, did Charles Izard come as near to collapsing as ever he had done in his unemotional life.

"Nothing keeps me, Mr. Izard. I am here."

"Etta Romney, by God!" he exclaimed, and in the same breath he told them that the rehearsal was over.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE IMPRESARIO'S PRAYER

So the Lady Evelyn had become Etta Romney once more, the child of the theatre, the daughter of a mystery which London was upon the eve of solving. The events which brought her to this resolution are briefly outlined in a letter which she wrote to her father upon the morning after her interview with the great Charles Izard at the Carlton Theatre. No longer ashamed of her resolution, she took up her residence boldly at the Savoy Hotel and entered her own name in the visitors' book, afraid of none.

SAVOY HOTEL,
Thursday.

My dear Father:

I am here in London, according to my determination already announced to you. I shall live a little while at this hotel, and afterwards where my profession may make it necessary. Believe me, my dear father, that this life alone is best for me, and best for you at this moment. I could live no longer in a house where, rightly or wrongly, I have always felt a stranger—and my love for Gavin forbids me to hear those things which I must hear every day in my old home. Now that I am mistress of my own actions, you will be able to find an answer in my independence to those who are not to be answered in any other way. Should Count Odin follow me to London, he will learn that I am neither without friends nor resources;

and I shall not hesitate to call upon both for my protection. It is my intention to establish myself here until such time as news of Gavin's welfare may come to me or that I may, myself, go to seek it. That he has been the victim of foul play I am sure; and I will not rest until the truth is known. Dear father, if you must suffer because of me, forgive and forget, and be sure always of my love for you and my desire for your happiness. We are outcasts of fortune both, and while the world is enjoying our position, we know that it is false, that we are but intruders by accident, and that our past is rising up every day to laugh our ambitions to scorn. Happier far when we were wanderers and poor, with days of love and hope to live and no debt to pay to a great and insupportable heritage. Dear father, you will next hear of me as Etta Romney, the actress—but never forget that Evelyn will return to you if you have need of her; and that her love for you is imperishable. Willingly would she take your burdens upon her own shoulders, and give you those years of rest and peace which are your heart's desire. But, for the time being, she must live alone for the sake of the man who has befriended her and to whom she has given her love.

Dearest Father,
Your loving EVELYN always.

From which it is clear that the month of November found Gavin Ord still in Roumania and Count Odin again in Derbyshire. The latter had returned from Bukharest early in the month of September, and, dismissing his friends, the gypsies, had settled down at Melbourne Hall as one who, at no distant date, would be its master. That the Earl acquiesced in this assurance convinced Evelyn finally that she did not possess the whole of her father's story. Either he was a coward (and this she would never believe), or some mystery of her own past or his abetted the Count's

pretensions. No other explanation of the matter was possible; nor could she foresee a day which would rid her of the presence of a man who ever spoke to her of the heritage her mother's country had bequeathed to her and its penalties.

She had always feared Count Odin, and she feared him now when the true meaning of a man's love had been made known to her and her daily prayer was for Gavin's safety. Not that she doubted herself or the truth of her love, but that she feared that something in her blood which might bring her to the Count's arms and mock for all time her faith in her own womanhood and her spoken word that she would be Gavin's wife upon his return. So greatly did this fear haunt her that the days of waiting became almost insupportable. She would rise with the sun each morning and say, "to-day his letter will come." The nights found her brooding and restless and fighting ever against the insidious advances of a man who made love to her with a Southern tongue—and when he was repulsed had no shame to threaten her.

"Your English friend was a fool to go to the mountains," he would say; "we cannot protect him there—my Government is helpless. The prison in which my father lies, sent there by the man who should have been his friend, will not open to an Englishman's knock. If I could have helped your friend, I would have done so because he was your friend. You say that he loves you. I will believe it when the sun shines in England. My dear lady, your heart is in the South with the

vine and the pomegranates. All your life has not made an Englishwoman of you. You are like a flower that cries for the sun all day and withers because there is no sun. I will take you to a land of roses and set your feet upon golden sands. We will visit the East together—the color, the life, the music of it, shall enthrall us. There they will teach you how to love. In England your hearts are ice—but you have not an English heart."

Day by day these vehement protests would be made; day by day he whispered them in her ear, following her at home and abroad, in the galleries of Melbourne Hall, and to the glades and the thickets of the park. And her father abetted him, not openly by word but silently by impotent consent he acquiesced in her persecution, protesting that Georges Odin's son had a claim of hospitality upon him, and that he could not shut the gates of the house in his face. In plain truth, Robert Forrester sinned not of his will but of despair. He did not dare to tell Evelyn that, by the English law, Dora d'Istran might not be recognized as his wife at all and that she, his daughter, had therefore but a dubious claim to that dignity which the accidents of fortune had thrust upon him. He loved her, understood every whim of that strange, romantic mind, and believed, it may be, that the young Count would not be an unworthy husband for her. But the fear that she would charge him with the shame prevailed above other thoughts. He would not that she should pay the price for the follies and the amours of his youth.

And what of Evelyn herself, meanwhile? She

was as one to whom the heaven of life has been suddenly revealed after long years of darkness and doubt. If she understood the meaning of womanhood, that of manhood was not hidden from her. In Gavin Ord she had, for the first time, met and known intimately an Englishman; understood the nobility of man, the resolution, the courage of those reticent personalities by which the nation has been made great and its children sent out to rule the new countries of the world. Such a knowledge uplifted her and revealed truths which had been hidden during her childhood. By Gavin's love would her soul be re-born; by faith in him would the victory over her heritage be won. This had become her credo, sustaining her in the conflict, and sending her to London with a brave heart and an unconquerable determination to win independence and freedom. More than this, she believed that the great city would give her friends; and that these friends would tell her how to find Gavin, and, if need be, to save him. No longer could she hide it from herself that something beyond the quest for Georges Odin kept her English friend in Roumania. She had received but two letters from him, and these had been written during the early days of his journey. The rest was silence and a dreadful doubt creeping upon her as a shadow; the doubt which said, "he may have given his life for you; he may never return."

We have said that Evelyn took up her residence at the Savoy Hotel, fearing no longer the disclosure of her identity. Thither upon the second morning came little Dulcie Holmes and the melan-

choly Lucy Grey, entering her splendid room with timid steps and altogether abashed by the changed circumstances under which they found their friend. Their introduction of themselves was characteristic. Dulcie, unable to restrain her impulse, threw herself into Evelyn's arms and waited to apologize until she had kissed her. Lucy Grey stood bolt upright and rebuked her friend with almost tearful melancholy.

"Oh, how can you, Dulcie . . . and it's all in the papers too."

"I don't care a bit," rejoined the unabashed Dulcie. "I must kiss her if she'll kill me for it." And then to Evelyn she said: "Oh, you darling Lady Etta, oh, I am glad; I can't believe it's really true. But I've always said you'd come and I've told Mr. Izard so—and there's the gold watch you sent me, round my neck where it's always been since the day it came—and, oh, Etta, what times we will have again—what times!"

Lucy Gray appeared altogether dumbfounded by the familiarity.

"You forget yourself, Dulcie," she protested again and again, "after it being in the papers too—you certainly forget yourself. How can you say such things—to her ladyship as we all know after what's in the papers. I'm sure, miss, your ladyship won't think any the worse of Dulcie for this. It's her bringing up, that's what it is."

Evelyn was very much amused; but she hastened to reassure them, and, insisting upon their relating all their personal troubles (which they did with many exclamations and minute particu-

lars), she ventured to asked them what the papers really had said and why it should make a difference to them. To this they answered in a breath that the Carlton would reopen in a fortnight with "Haddon Hall" and Miss Etta Romney in the title-rôle.

"And it says you're a Duchess, and Mr. Izard wouldn't say so before though he knew it all the time." Dulcie added with considerable enthusiasm, "Oh, Etta, how you kept it from us all, just as though you had been no different to anybody else. But I knew you were; I said you were no ordinary human being, and Lucy knew it. My life's never been the same since you went away, Etta. You won't leave us again, will you?"

They rambled on alternately in confusion and delight while Evelyn sent for the morning papers and read the news they spoke of. There, sure enough, was the story written for all to read.

"Many will hear with pleasure," said the "Daily Shuffler," "that one of the most capable and finished of our younger actresses is about to return to the stage. Some months ago, all dramatic London was not ashamed to be curious concerning the Romney Mystery. A new play presented to us an artiste of no common order. Scarcely had we settled down to admire her when she disappeared from our ken, and, while we do not doubt that certain of her friends were in the secret, this was well kept and remained undiscovered by the public. Now we know that Etta Romney is the *nom de theatre* of Lord Melbourne's daughter, the Lady Evelyn. Mr. Charles Izard informs us that he is about to present her in the rôle already familiar to us and sure of a wide welcome. Etta Romney, assuredly, will establish the success of the Carlton Theatre as no other actress of our time could do. We offer

our cordial greetings upon her return to the stage, and congratulate all concerned upon the clever advertisement achieved."

Evelyn cringed when she read the last words; but her sense of humor proved greater than her annoyance.

"Did you believe, does anyone really believe, that I went away to advertise myself?" she asked the girls.

They answered in a breath that all the world believed it.

"Why, what else should it have been for? They say you and Mr. Izard did it, just as he lost Elsie Barton's jewels last year and had Billie Dan photographed in a motor-car accident. People love anything like that—they think it's so clever. There'll be such a scene when we open, Etta, as never was known. Shall I call you Etta, though, or should it be your ladyship?"

Etta was about to answer her as well as her amusement would let her when a man-servant opened the door and announced a visitor.

"Mr. Charles Izard," he said, and the girls stood up abashed.

"Mr. Izard here, however shall I look him in the face!" cried Lucy in an extremity of terror.

"I could drop through the ceiling for my nerves," said Dulcie, but she did nothing of the sort; merely standing and giggling nervously while the great man came panting in; and he, who had "presented" so many, now presented himself with the air of a Rajah just dismounted from an

elephant, or a monarch about to address an assembly of barons.

"My dear," he said to Evelyn, "I've come to pay my respects to you, and that's what I do to few of 'em. You've got London by the throat and we'll both be rich before you let go. Didn't I say you'd come back to me? Why, when I think how we've fooled the populace, I could shout 'bully' until my tongue's tied. Now, let these girls go their way and we'll talk business. I've come to offer you a five years' engagement certain, and there's no one in London is going to better my terms. Three words and we settle it. Let 'em be spoken and we're friends for life."

"Mr. Izard," said Etta quickly, "I will play at your theatre for three months. Then I am going away. If I return, I will come to you again. But I may never return, and so I cannot engage myself to do so. Should my present determination be altered——"

Izard laughed hardly and almost impatiently.

"At coming or going, my dear, you have no equal in Europe," he admitted gloomily . . . and then quickly, fearing to offend her, he added, "Well, have your own way. Take a fortune or leave one, Charles Izard will always be your friend."

It was a great admission, honestly meant, though uttered with the regret of one who saw a golden vision falling from his view. To himself, the great man said: "There is a man and he is not in England. The Lord send him a handsome funeral before the mischief is done."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PRISONERS AT SETCHEVO

Gavin heard the tap of the blind man's stick as the old Chevalier felt his way from the bare vaulted room in which a scanty supper had been served to them; and a fit of despondency coming upon him, more bitter than ordinary, he buried his face in his hands and uttered his heart-stricken complaint aloud.

"What are they all doing, then—why has Chesny broken his promise. Good God, Arthur, have we no friends at all? Is there no one who has interested himself in our story? I can't believe it. It isn't the English way. They must find out sooner or later. It can't be for all time."

Arthur, whose arm and shoulder were bound up in a garment that might have been a Moorish bernouse, smoked his pipe quietly and did not for a little while know what to say. Bitterly as he had paid for that which he called a "little trot to the Balkans," the English spirit forbade the utterance of any reproach, or even a word that his friend might take amiss.

"My people never trouble about me," he said. "They know me too well. You see, I've only a couple of uncles and a maiden aunt to go into hysterics; and my lawyers won't advertise while

they can bank my dividends. It's different with you, Gavin. I'll bet your people were on the scent long ago; and that's to say nothing about Evelyn. Of course, she has not held her tongue. No woman does when she's in love with a man; and sometimes she can be eloquent when she is not. Oh, yes, I'll go nap on Evelyn all the time. She must know that we shouldn't stay in this cursed country for three months if we had the train fare to get out. Of course, she'll cry out about it—and if she cries loudly enough the Government will act. Not that I believe much in Governments—they generally weigh in when the corpse is buried."

Gavin smiled but did not raise his head. A fire of logs burned in the grate before them and filled the room with a haze of heavy smoke; the tapping of a man's stick had ceased, and the house was without sounds and void. In the hills above them a wild wind scoured the clefts and sent whirling clouds of snow to cover all living things below. The torrent beneath the drawbridge had become a monstrous scala of icy steps, a ladder with glistening rungs which none but the eagle dared.

"Three months—is it really three months?" Gavin exclaimed in a tone of unspeakable weariness; "three months in this awful den. Three months listening to that blind devil and his insults. God, I would never have believed that a man could go through so much and live. And you, Arthur—not a word from you since the beginning. That's what hits me. If you'd only speak out and

tell me what I ought to hear, it would be easier."

Arthur laughed and stooped to light his pipe by the fire again.

"What's the good of talking. A pal asks you to come and you go. Is it his fault if a wheel comes off the coach? Let me have five minutes alone with that blind scoundrel and I'll be eloquent enough. Otherwise I intend to make myself as comfortable as I can under the circumstances. There's no fun in boxing scimitars—as we both of us have discovered."

They had discovered it, indeed. From the first day of their captivity in the mountains, insult, foul, oft-repeated, revolting insult had been their daily punishment. Coarse food, filthy rooms . . . these they could have suffered; but the blind man's tongue, the lash of the whip his servants wielded, might have driven braver men to that last resource which faith in God alone can question or deny. The very wound which Arthur Kenyon made light of had been the first fruits of their English temper. A gypsy had lashed him across the shoulder with a riding whip and he had answered with an English left, straight and unerring. But the blow had scarcely been struck before a wild horde filled the room, its knives unsheathed, murder in its eyes—and from murder the terrible voice of the blind man alone withheld it. So the two comrades spoke of fighting scimitars, that was no jest at all.

"You are a friend in a hundred thousand," Gavin exclaimed as one who spoke from his very heart. "I'm not going to thank you, Arthur.

What is the good of words between you and me? Here we are, worse than dead, by God . . . and not a ray of light, not a speck anywhere. How will it end? How can it end? You heard him tell me this morning that Evelyn will marry his rascally son in ten days' time. Well, to-night I'm just in that humor which says, it may be true, he may have tired her out, lied to her, promised her God knows what, my liberty perhaps and her father's happiness afterwards. It might be that, Arthur. I try to put it fairly, and yet I must say that it might be so——"

"There are a hundred things that might be so, old man. This house might fall down the hill and the eagles carry you and me to the tree-tops. We might have *pâté de foie gras* for supper and eighty-four champagne to wash it down with. There's no greater rot than the might-be-so. Tell me how to get out of this cursed den and I'll listen with both ears. As for Lady Evelyn—she's too much a woman to do any of the things you talk about. For all you know some sham tale has been told her—telegrams sent in our name, or something to lull her suspicions. When a man is travelling a thousand miles from home, people don't get alarmed about him for a month or two. But this I'll stake my existence upon, that once Evelyn guesses it's not all right with us, she'll move heaven and earth to know the reason why. That's what keeps me sane. I should kill this old man and myself afterwards if it were not that I

believe in my friends. Doing so, I just sit down and wait like the Spaniards for to-morrow."

Gavin heard him in silence. This great room had become their prison-house; refectory by day and dormitory by night. For an hour each morning, they were permitted to go out into the court, where a vista of the sky spoke to them of liberty and the massive portcullis of the drawbridge mocked the idle word. "Until the Englishwoman is my son's wife," had been the sentence pronounced by the old Chevalier; and he repeated it day by day, tapping his way to their great bare cell, striking at them with his stick, cursing them—a very fiend incarnate, mad with the lust of money and the desire of revenge. And against such an enemy they were doubly powerless—not only by reason of his blindness, but by the knowledge that unseen eyes followed him to their room and that his allies, the gypsies, hidden in the house of Setchevo, were ready to do his bidding did he but raise his voice to call them.

Brave men, who do not know fear in a common way, may bend and break before such torture as this . . . the torture of impotence and of unseen presences about them. Gavin had come to declare that he would sooner a man had burned his hand in a flame than compelled him to listen each day at dawn for the tapping of that stick upon the floor and the coming of that terrible sightless figure. Even in his sleep the old Chevalier would visit him, approaching with his claw-like hands extended and his eyes seeming to shine as live coals in the darkness. Never had

he imagined that so much malignity, cunning, and vermin could be the fruits of imagined wrong or be united in one personality. And all his fine notions of retribution and reconciliation, of the old man's visit to England and the Earl's reception of him there—how vainglorious they had been and how childish, he said. Justly had such folly been overtaken and punished. He realized that his knowledge of human nature was pitifully small.

"Evelyn will help us if she can," he said at length, poking the fire restlessly and listening as of habit for the dreaded beat of the blind man's stick upon the stone floor without; "she will help us if she can, but what can a woman do? Let's regard that view of it as out of the question. What I would ask—what you have been asking—is just this—why does Chesny do nothing? He must know that if all had been well, we should have written and let him hear it. His Government could have these rats out in five minutes. Why does he do nothing? He's an old Winchester boy and could see us through if he knew. I can't think that such a man as Chesny would sit on his back and just ask what's happened. He's moving somewhere—pity it isn't on the road to Setchevo."

"Perhaps it is, and they've lost the road," rejoined Kenyon with a sarcasm he could not conceal. "Don't you see, Gavin, that these devils will have been clever enough to have taken care of themselves. Of course, they will. They give it out that we are making for the Castle of Okna

which may be any number of miles you like from Setchevo. The escort—God save the mark!—knows better than to blab. Likely enough Chesny has heard that we crossed the frontier into Servia. Those poor devils who were killed are unlikely to be important enough to be searched for. Life is cheap hereabouts—and what is a Turk more or less? Chesny says we are all right and goes picnicking. Evelyn waits for our letters and doesn't a bit understand why they don't come. We must be patient, old chap—patient and brave. Nothing else will save us."

Gavin assented, though he could admit to himself that the common heroics of the nursery were the poorest food for a man in his situation. His days of waiting, patience, and bravery were so many hours of exquisite torture, like none he had imagined a man might suffer and live through. Evelyn, what of her, he asked himself waking and sleeping. Would the heritage in her blood deliver her to the bondage prepared for her; or had she, in his absence, the will to conquer it? He knew not what to think; his brain wearied of conjecture and wakened only when, as now, the blind man's stick tapped the bare stones and the sightless eyes looked into his own.

"Do you hear him, Arthur; he's coming to say Good-night to us."

"I hear, old chap—my God, if the man could only see——"

"Better blind—you would have killed him but for that, Arthur."

"It's true, Gavin, I would have killed him."

"And then—his friends. Better blind, Arthur."

Arthur said "Hush," for the sound of footsteps drew very near; and now they could hear the old Chevalier panting and shuffling and plainly approaching them. When he entered the room they perceived that something had occurred beyond the ordinary. The hand upon the stick quivered and trembled—the muscles of the forehead were twitching; there were drops of sweat upon the man's forehead, and his voice echoed the tumult of passion which shook him.

"One of you has written a letter to Bukharest," he cried hoarsely; "by whose hand was that?"

The two men looked at each other amazed. Neither had written such a letter nor knew aught of it.

"By whose hand?" the Chevalier continued, his anger growing as he spoke; "silence will not serve you, gentlemen. By whose hand was that letter written?"

Gavin now laughed aloud with a laugh that expressed both contempt and defiance.

"Had I written it, I would not have answered you," said he; "as I have not, your question merely arouses my curiosity."

Arthur did not answer at all; but he stood up as though fearing attack and his hand rested upon the back of the heavy oak chair—one of the few ornaments of that dismal room. His silence provoked Georges Odin as no words could have done.

"Let your friend speak," he cried, advancing

with stick upraised. "I will know the truth; my servants shall flog it out of you—do you hear, I will have you whipped—answer me, who wrote that letter?"

Kenyon said not a word; and now the old man struck at him with his stick wildly and blindly, in a paroxysm of anger. One heavy blow fell upon Gavin's shoulder and he stepped back with an oath; but the young man's temper could not brook the new insult and he flung himself heavily upon the Chevalier and they fell to the ground together.

"Arthur—for God's sake——" cried Gavin.

"It's all right, Gavin; I won't hurt him, but I must have that stick."

He staggered to his feet, the bludgeon in his hand; but the blind man did not move. Fearing he knew not what, dreading the sudden apparition of the gypsies who spied upon their every movement, Gavin snatched a log from the fire, and, stooping, he held it up that he might look upon the old man's face.

"He is dead," he said.

Arthur did not speak. The log blazed and crackled and ebbed to darkness and still the two men did not move. Without, in the courtyard, not a sound could be heard. The House of Setchevo might have been a tomb of the living.

But the Englishmen knew that it concealed their hidden enemies and that the dawn would bring them to the room to avenge the man who had been their patron and their friend.

CHAPTER XXX

THERE IS NO NEWS OF GAVIN ORD

London, which loves a duchess or even personages of slightly less degree, when it discovers them in the arena where all the world may stretch out a finger to touch the noble pedestals, this London liked the story of the Lady Evelyn and flocked to the Carlton Theatre to see her and to criticise. The great Charles Izard, who measured all human greatness by the box-office, did not hesitate to declare that business to the extent of nineteen hundred pounds a week spoke more eloquently than any critic . . . and he would add triumphantly, "Why, I discovered her, and she makes the rest of them look like thirty cents." By this time he implied a general inferiority of other actresses who were not filling their theatres to the extent of nineteen hundred pounds a week; and, regardless of the plain fact that mere curiosity had become his best friend, he continued to declare that he was the greatest and the wisest of men and that Etta Romney would have been a dismal failure under other management.

Evelyn certainly was a great success. No dinner party failed to discuss her charm or to admit it. You heard of her every day in theatrical clubs; a common question when people met was,

"Have you seen Etta Romney?" Returning to their first judgments, the critics recanted nothing, though more than one really discerning writer perceived a change in her. The splendid Watley, with some nice asides upon Sophocles, Plautus, Judic, and Voltaire, admitted a difference:

"This is not the Di Vernon of the Spring," he wrote; "here is a newer conception, something of Rejane, a voice of sincerity matured; introspective comedy and the drama of pathos. . . ."

The "Daily Shuffler," in plainer terms, said:

"Miss Romney does not let herself go—she appears to take poor Di's troubles too greatly to heart. We confess to certain watery tributes to her touching earnestness scintillating upon our manly cornea . . . but we would remind this charming young actress that we go to the theatre to laugh as well as to cry . . . and she has forgotten that. Perhaps the November fogs have something to do with it. She came to us in the Spring . . . and with the Spring her lightness of heart may be given back to her. One of her audience, at least, hopes that it will be so. . . ."

No one was more conscious of this change than Evelyn herself. That wild, almost uncontrollable passion of art, had left her. She liked to think that she had conquered it, and became a new Etta, for the sake of a man who loved her and had saved her from herself. Here she was, lauded to the skies by critical London; asked to every house, fawned upon, coveted, proclaimed a success beyond knowledge; and yet as far from knowing the secrets of such success as ever she had been in all her life. Anxiety for Gavin's safety attended

every hour of her busy day. Confident at first that his dogged perseverance, his stubborn resolution, and his manifest prudence would be weapons enough for the work he had to do in Roumania, she had paid but little heed to his silence; for that she understood to be a wild country and one which would not expedite his letters. When he ceased to write, she said that he would have gone to the mountains. A longer spell of silence and the first whisper of her alarms began to make itself heard. How if he could not write to her because of accident or illness or even conspiracy? Terrified by the phantoms of imagination which now crowded upon her, she compelled her father to warn the Ministry at Bukharest, the Foreign Office, the Consulate. The letters were answered by promises as meaningless as they were futile. Gavin's few relatives in England bestirred themselves with little result—while Bukharest answered that the Englishmen had crossed the mountains into Servia and that nothing further of them was known.

So Evelyn had come to London to save the man she loved, if her new independence and her love might save him. She cared no longer that her father should know of this determination; for she doubted both his will to help her and the honesty of the declaration that he would do so. In truth, Robert Forrester had been unable to give battle to those forces which the years and his own youth had raged against him. To one who had loved the wild life of an adventurer, who had sown tares in many lands, the harvest time

of age could support no pretentious dignity nor long maintain those greater ambitions which had momentarily attended his succession to the earldom.

He sank beneath the mental burdens; became an old man when he should still have been in his prime; could utter but a senile assent to every rogue who tricked him. Deep down in his heart lay hunger for the old life. An evil cynicism laughed at the restraints which place and power put upon him.

"Better a night on the hills with Zallony," he could tell himself, " than a life's dominion in the realms of social fatuity." It would have been so easy for him had Evelyn married Georges Odin's son. What it might have meant to her he had hardly considered.

And yet possibly his love for Evelyn was the truest emotion of his life. When her letter reached him and he could bring himself to understand it, the blow fell with a stunning force which seemed to shatter every remaining idol of his life. His beloved daughter! The mistress of his house! Capering about upon a stage for the guineas of a man he, Robert Forrester, could have bought up twenty times over. Here was a debacle beyond any he had imagined. The humiliation of it, the cruelty of it—more than that, the malice of her destiny! Was she not Dora d'Istran's daughter, and had not this blood of rebellion run in her veins since her childhood? What else could he have looked for, he asked himself . . . and in the same breath he set the logic of it aside and sat down to write to her.

It was a pitiful letter, full of the tenderest expressions and the bitterest reproach.

"Do you owe nothing to my name?" he asked her, and in the same sentence could protest his love for her. "I am an old man and am alone and must look to the newspapers for news of the daughter who is all to me. Is this fame so much above a father's affection, then; so dear a thing that his home must be a home no longer because of it? The people say you are a great actress; some day you will ask yourself, Evelyn, if it was worth being that to wound one who has had no greater desire than the happiness of his only child. . . ."

Just in such a strain had he delivered himself at home, and, now as then, the words earned but a cold response. "There is some secret of my father's life which is hidden from me," Evelyn said. What it could be, why it should affect her, she knew not. When he spoke of his failing health, the letter found her more sympathetic. She would have gone to him at any cost had she understood that he was really ill; but the general terms he used seemed to imply no immediate necessity . . . and was there not Gavin to be considered?

Indeed, this priceless gift of love now influenced every act and deed of her life. She counted the hours which should bring her news of Gavin, worshipped her own image of him upon the stage at night; wrestled unceasingly with the voices which would speak of the Etta Romney that had been; the child of passionate dreamings and of an Eastern heritage no longer.

And her prayer was this, for Gavin's safety and her own salvation in his love.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE HOUSE AT HAMPSTEAD

Evelyn had played Di Vernon's part for thirty nights exactly when just as she was going on the stage, on the evening of the thirty-first day, a call-boy put a telegram into her hand and she had scarcely opened it when she discovered that it was from her father.

"I am passing through London upon my way to Paris," it said; "perhaps I shall be in the theatre. If not, come to me afterwards to De Kyser's Hotel. I will engage a room for you there."

She told the boy that there was no answer to the message and immediately passed to the garden scene she had played so often and always with such sweetness and light. The thought that her father might be in the house excited her strangely. Difficult as it is for a player upon the stage to identify those in the stalls, she peered intently, nevertheless, at the serried ranks before her and was conscious of a sense of disappointment when her search was vain. A second thought suggested that her father might be hidden by the curtains of a private box; and with this in her mind she found herself playing, not, as it were, to an audience of strangers, but to one who loved

her and had never understood her. Surely her father would read something of her own story, of her loyalty to her old home, and the depth of feeling which had sent her from it when he listened to Di Vernon and her sweet sincerity. This was her hope, though she knew not whether the Earl were present or no. To her anxious questions during the *entractes,* old Jacobs, the stage-door keeper, declared that no one " hadn't come round from the front not since he'd drunk his supper beer "—a vague answer, insomuch as the beer in question made its appearance at six o'clock and continued to do so at short intervals until eleven.

She must suffer her curiosity, therefore; and take what profit of it she might. When the play was over and no news came from the front, she concluded with a natural regret that her father had not been present; and she was just wondering how she would get to De Kyser's Hotel and exactly where it might be when old Jacobs himself, unable to find a messenger, came round to tell her that a carriage stood at the door ready for her . . . and that it was a " nobby one " to boot.

" She's footlights enough for a ballet," the old man said, with the patronizing air of one who did not keep motor cars and thought very little of those who did. " He says he comes from your father, but I shouldn't wonder if it were from Buckingham Palace. Will you go, Miss, or shall I say something civil to him? "

Evelyn hastened to say that she would go; and,

putting on her furs, she went out to the carriage. This was waiting in the Haymarket, and the driver appeared to be quite a boy, an open-faced, honest-looking lad, who told her frankly that he was not to take her to De Kyser's Hotel, but to a house at Hampstead where the Earl expected her.

"There's a Mr. Fillimore there, Miss," he said. "I think he's a clergyman. They said you would know, and it would be all right for you to stop the night. The gentlemen are going away early in the morning, I believe—at least I heard the butler saying so——"

It was rather startling, but Evelyn suspected nothing. That old chatter-box, the Vicar of Moretown, had relatives at Hampstead, she knew, and nothing would be more natural than that he should have accompanied her father to town. None the less, it was annoying to have to go as she was; and nothing but the Earl's known intention to travel abroad almost immediately induced her to consent.

"Could you bring me back to-night if I wished?" she asked the lad.

He answered: "Oh, certainly, Miss. I'm up half the night carrying ladies about sometimes."

She entered the carriage without further parley and they drove swiftly through Regent Street and Portland Place. Her desire to meet her father betrayed her unconquered affection for him. She would tell him frankly that she would not return to him until she went as Gavin Ord's wife; and that her life from this time would be devoted to discovering the result of Gavin's journey and the reasons which kept him in Roumania. This would

not be to say that he had ever dealt ungenerously with her; far from it, the whole of his immense fortune had ever been at her command; but the advantages which his money conferred upon her entailed corresponding duties; and she did not believe that her love for Gavin permitted her to live under the roof which also sheltered Georges Odin's son. For these reasons she had left her home; and to justify herself by them she now went to Hampstead at her father's bidding.

There was much gray mist in the lowlands by Regent's Park; and although the night became clearer as they climbed the height to Hampstead, it remained dark and moonless, and rarely permitted Evelyn to say where she was or how far they had driven. In no way concerned but very tired, she closed her eyes and listened dreamily to the rolling sound of wheels upon the wet road, telling herself that life was truly one swift journey with the echo of the worldly wheels ever rolling in human ears and saying "onward to an unknown goal; whether you will or no; desiring to rest or zealous; still shall this coach of destiny hurry you on by the houses of childhood, of love, and of death, to that kingdom of mystery which all must enter." How happy had she been if Gavin were beside her and they journeyed together to some haven of their desires, while all the past should be written out and that peace of understanding be truly found. Vain dream, sweet illusion—a voice called her from it, the rush of cold air upon her face awakened her. They had

arrived at their destination and their journey was done.

Plainly an old house. Evelyn starting up from her dream perceived an old-fashioned stone porch with clematis thick upon it, an open door showing a brightly lighted hall within and a blazing welcome warmth from an open grate beyond. To the footman who helped her from the carriage she addressed a brief question.

"Is my father, is Mr. Fillimore here?" she asked.

The man bent his head; she understood him to be a foreigner; and, impatient to know, she entered the hall and the great doors were immediately closed behind her.

"This way if you would please, ladyship," the footman continued in such execrable English that she would have laughed at it upon any other occasion. "The gentlemen were here."

He opened a door upon the right-hand side of the hall and she found herself in a small panelled boudoir; so perfect in its scheme of decoration, so cozy, so warm, that she asked no longer why her father had come to Hampstead.

"Please tell the Earl that I am here," she said —and remembered as she said it that the Vicar's relatives had been spoken of at Moretown as very prodigies of riches. The footman, in answer to her, nodded his head as foreigners will; and venturing no more English phrases he left her alone.

How cold she was! And what a picture of a room! The Japanese panelling delighted her. The hangings in green silk delighted her. What

inexpressibly luxurious chairs! And books everywhere, books in English, in French, in Italian—novels, biographies, picture-books. Did a fire ever roar up a chimney with such a pleasant sound. The warmth made the blood tingle in her veins; she bathed in it, stooped to it, caressed it with hands outspread to the blaze. And this was her occupation when she heard the door open behind her; and leaping up, said, "Dear father—I am so glad."

"My dear lady, your father has not yet arrived."

She stood transfixed, realizing her situation and the peril of it in one swift instant. Count Odin, the man she had fled from; Count Odin, whose very name she had tried to forget, he was her host then. Not for a moment would she deceive herself with the consideration of other possibilities or likely accidents. She had been lured to the house by a trick, and the intentions of those who brought her there could not but be evil. So much she understood, and in understanding found her courage.

"My father is not here," she repeated after him, guarding her self-control and standing before him defiantly.

He answered her almost with humility.

"No, he is not yet come, I am sorry to say. It is not my fault. His reasons are his own . . . and, Lady Evelyn, there are many who will say that he is right."

She looked at him amazed.

"Did you ask me here to justify myself?" she

exclaimed, the blood running to her cheeks and her flashing eyes. "Am I to answer, then, to you? I will believe such an impertinence when I hear it." And turning from him to the fire, she said, "How little you understand me—how little you could ever know of any Englishwoman. To dare to bring me here—to think that I should be afraid of you!"

He smiled at her contempt and came a little nearer to her.

"I never thought that," he said slowly. "I never accused you of want of courage, Lady Evelyn. Perhaps I am guilty of an impertinence. You shall tell me when you have heard my news —the news I bring you from Roumania."

Evelyn turned about in spite of herself and looked him full in the face.

"The news from Roumania!"

"Certainly, news of your friend, Mr. Gavin Ord."

The plot had been well contrived, and it did not fail. Curiosity, nay, fear almost, proved stronger than Evelyn's alarm or any thought of her own safety. Vainly she tried to suppress her emotion; while the man, for his part, followed every movement of her graceful figure with eyes that devoured its contour and a purpose which said, "she shall be my wife this night."

"Well?" she cried, her heart beating wildly, her hands clinched. What hours of anxiety, of dread, of passionate regret that one word recalled to her.

The Count drew a chair near the fire and mo-

tioned to her to sit. She obeyed him with a docility which did not surprise him. He held the master cards and would play them one by one.

"Well," he said lightly enough, "to begin with, your friend is still in Roumania."

"Am I unaware of that?" she exclaimed.

"Of course, you would not be. He is still in Roumania and a prisoner."

"A prisoner—why should he be a prisoner?"

"Because, dear lady, he is my father's enemy."

She realized what it meant and sat resting her bowed head upon her little hands.

"I will go to Roumania; I will see him," she said presently.

Odin smiled again at that.

"It would be a hazardous journey, and I fear an unprofitable one," said he.

"It can be no less profitable than the silent friendship of those who should speak. But we are talking in parables," she said quickly, "and for once I believe that you are telling me the truth."

"A flattering admission. I will do my best to be worthy of it. Let us continue the story as we began. Your friend is a prisoner in the house of my friends. They will release him upon the day I command them to do so—not an hour before. They are my servants, Lady Evelyn—and in the Carpathians to obey is the only commandment known to them. Should I say to them 'this man must not return to England,' then he would never return. I think you can understand that. It rests with me to save your friend's life or to

. . . but we are a long way from coming to that yet."

Evelyn trembled but she did not speak. The plain issue of that duel of sex could not be hidden from her. She was in the house of a man who had brought her there by a trick; a scoundrel and an adventurer, and she was alone. The price of Gavin Ord's liberty was the surrender of her honor. She understood and was silent, and the man knew that she understood.

"We are a long way from that," he continued, with a new note in his voice which spoke chiefly of his passion for her. "I hope that we shall never come to it. When I first saw you in London, Lady Evelyn, I said that there should never be another woman for me. I say so again to-night. If you do not marry me, I will never marry. Yes, I love you, and I am of a nation that learns from its childhood how women should be loved. Consent to be my wife and I will live for nothing else but your happiness. Your English friend shall win his liberty to-morrow; your father shall be my father's friend. I will live where you wish to live, serve you faithfully, have no thoughts but those you wish me to have. Evelyn—that is what I would first say to you to-night—that I love you—that you must love me—that I cannot live without you."

He bent over her and tried to touch her hand. She did not doubt that she had become, as he said, the great hope of his life. And just as she had said in Derbyshire, "Etta Romney would marry him," so now for an instant did the same voice

speak to her to tell her the truths of such a passion as this and to put the spell of its great temptation upon her. Then, white and trembling, the true Evelyn spoke.

"Count Odin," she said, "I love another man. I must answer you once and forever—this cannot be; it is impossible."

He heard her patiently, did not yet threaten her, and, indeed, continued to be such a lover as he had declared the men of his nation to be.

"I believe nothing of the kind. This man has appeared before you as a hero. He goes like a new Don Quixote to tilt against the windmills of his folly. You do not love such a man—and he—he knows nothing of what love is."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I do love him," she said very calmly. "I love him, and I shall marry him."

"When he returns from Roumania?"

"When he returns, or when I go to him there."

He laughed now at her earnestness.

"We will go together—you and I," he said. "We will start for Paris to-morrow. It is a stage upon our journey. I sent for you so—to go to Paris with me to-morrow. Of course, your father goes. He will tell you so when he comes here. He goes with us, and is pleased to be out of England. Why should he not be? Here is all the town gaping at his daughter. That pains him. I, too, dislike it, for I do not wish the world to call my wife an actress. No, Lady Evelyn, we shall prevent it—your father and I. In France, you will forget all this. The day will come when

you will know that we have been your friends."

He would have had it appear that he spoke with sincerity and earnestness; but Evelyn heard little of that which he said. The deep-laid plot never for a moment deceived her. She knew that her father was in no way concerned in it; she understood that she had been brought to the house by a subterfuge and that courage alone would save her.

"Count Odin," she said as she rose and faced him, "when my father wishes me to go to Paris he will tell me so. Your threats I treat with contempt. You are one of those men whose part in life is to be woman's enemy. I know you now, and am not even afraid of you. Let me leave this house quietly and I will forget that I ever came here. Compel me to stay and I will find a way to the nearest police station in spite of you. That is my answer. I have nothing further to say."

He listened to her as though he had expected just such an answer as this.

"Dear lady," he said with provoking insolence, "do you know that it is one o'clock and that we are nearly five miles from Charing Cross?"

"It would make no difference to me if we were fifty."

"But your father is coming here——"

"That is not true."

"Come, you compel me to be angry. Understand that I have no intention whatever of letting you go. If you persist, I must speak more frankly."

"A new experience. Stand aside, please. I am going to leave this house."

He laughed brutally.

"Go to your English friend. I will telegraph that you are coming. Go to him—if he is still alive, dear lady."

She shuddered but did not flinch.

"I will tell the story where all the world may read it to-morrow."

"To-morrow—to-morrow, how far off is to-morrow sometimes. Beware of to-morrow, Lady Evelyn."

He drew aside and opened the door for her; and she, wondering greatly at his apparent compliance, put her furs about her shoulders. Just for one instant she stopped and with a woman's instinct would have bargained with him for Gavin's life.

"Give me your word of honor that no harm shall happen to Mr. Ord and I will be silent," she said.

He crossed the room and looked closely into her face.

"We will speak of that to-morrow—when your father comes," he said.

The words perplexed her. She hesitated but had nothing more to say. Outside in the hall, the fire still burned brightly in the open grate, and the gas lamps were lighted. Not a sound could be heard; no human being appeared to inhabit that remote and lonely tenement. Trembling with excitement and afraid, she knew not of what, Evelyn had reached the front door and was stoop-

ing to unbolt it when a pair of strong arms were clasped suddenly about her and a heavy cloak thrown over her head. Taken utterly by surprise, overwhelmed by terror of the circumstance, she felt herself lifted from her feet and carried swiftly from the hall. All her strength could not fling those strong arms from her nor put aside the cloak which stifled her cries. Inanimate, afraid as she had never been in all her life, she lay almost senseless in the man's arms and let him do as he would with her.

For she knew that she was Odin's prisoner, and that no act or will of hers could save her from the plot so subtly contrived.

CHAPTER XXXII

A SHOT IN THE HILLS

The two men sat in the great bare room of the House at Setchevo and watched the ebbing firelight as it played upon the dead man's face and declared the horror of it. Not a sound came to them but that of their heavy breathing. They feared almost to raise a hand lest by any movement the living should be called to avenge the dead. Just as he had fallen, heavily and in anger, so the old Chevalier lay, his face upturned, the sightless eyes still open as though gazing now upon the eternal mysteries. And none knew better than Gavin Ord that death might be their worst enemy, loosing upon them the worst passions of their jailers and forbidding them any longer even to hope.

This he knew, and yet there came no profit of the knowledge. If he feared death, it was for Evelyn's sake. Sitting there by the firelight, waiting in tense doubt for the coming of the dead man's friends, he could recall a picture of Evelyn as first he saw her in the hall of the Manor. How stately she was; with what dignity she had received him! And what an odd mental hallucination he had suffered when he thought to hear her crying to him from the river. But was it alto-

gether an hallucination and did this explanation satisfy? Here, to-night, it seemed that he must die because of his friendship for her. How foolish, then, the call from the unseen world had been if its meaning were so, and his own death had been the subject of the prophecy! That he could not believe. The firm idea that he had been chosen to love and befriend this beautiful girl remained his own even in this momentous hour. He must suffer this to save her—how or by what means he did not pretend to say—nor would he account death as other than a friend if by death salvation came to one who alone among women had taught him to say, "I love."

A wolf howled upon the hills without and the lingering, doleful cry, taken up by a thousand lifted throats, came upon the silence as the dead man's requiem. Arthur Kenyon shivered when he heard it and beat the fire down as though darkness were preferable to this aureole upon the staring face. When Gavin said "Hush," and bade him listen, he half turned, upon an impulse, toward the dead man as though the dead were about to speak. The terrible strain of that suspense had become insupportable. What mattered it since the end must be the same—sooner or later, to-night or to-morrow, the reckoning, the vengeance? He was young, and life might have much in store for him; but travel had taught him to say "Kismet" and he said it unflinchingly.

"There would be snow on the hills," he cried at last, as though his thoughts were out there upon the lonely mountain road.

Gavin, for answer, gripped him by the arm and forced him to listen.

"Do you not hear?" he cried in a broken whisper; "some one is calling the Chevalier?"

They bent together as though to hear more keenly. In the courtyard without, footsteps could now be heard and a voice crying, "Master, master!" The hour had come then! Here were those who sought them.

"Will you speak to them, Gavin?"

"Hush for God's sake—I must think, think——"

"That's a second footstep—can't you hear it? My God, Gavin, what shall we do?"

"Let me think, Arthur, let me think."

He buried his face in his hands and could feel his temples throbbing. For Evelyn's sake, for her—ah, if that miracle of love could but come to pass! To open the gates, to defy the perils of the hills, to pass as in flight by towns, rivers, cities, the abodes of men, the lonely passes, the lights of towns, the storms of seas, to venture all for Evelyn's sake. If it could be that? The voice of reason answered, "Fool, the men are at the door."

He rose excitedly from his chair and gripped his friend by the arm.

"Tap the pavement," he said, "tap as the old Chevalier used to. I must think, Arthur—for God's sake now tap with the stick."

Kenyon obeyed him as a child would have done. He tapped upon the stone floor with the stick but did not speak a word. Gavin had him by the arm

now and appeared almost as one in a trance. His eyes were half-closed; he muttered to himself, stretching out his hand and feeling, as it were, for a path which the darkness would disclose to him. And the word upon his lips was "Evelyn" —oft repeated, as though she were near and did not hear him.

"What are you going to do, Gavin?"

"To lead you from this house, Arthur—do not speak to me; some one is calling us, Arthur."

He passed out into the bare stone corridor leading to the banqueting hall. From the shadows one of the gypsies appeared with the swiftness of an apparition. He carried a lantern in his hand and lifted it while he spoke.

"Master!" he cried, and then reeled back, the words broken upon his lips.

They passed him by, leaving him cowering by the wall; he did not cry after them or raise an alarm. And Gavin went on swiftly, still toward the gate, as though his will would open it.

"No man could cross the hill road to-night," Kenyon said presently. He was thinking that if they passed the gates, their allies would be the wolves. Gavin did not answer him at all this time. He had come to the gate by which you reach the courtyard, and, lifting the latch, he went out unquestioned.

"You see," he said, "that fellow has just unlocked it. I knew it must be so, Arthur."

"He has gone to bring the others, Gavin."

"They will not hear him. Or if they come, they will be powerless to harm us, Arthur. It

must be so. I hear Evelyn's voice. She would not call me if the gates were shut."

Kenyon knew not what to say. Once or twice before he had known and seen Gavin in such a mood as this, led by unseen hands and speaking with another's voice. Never had he scoffed at it or misunderstood his friend. He took it to be a force within that was beyond his own experience. To-night, at least, it had led them out of the death-chamber to look once more upon the heaven of stars above.

"I will follow wherever you lead, Gavin," he said in a whisper, "only tell me what I must do."

"We are going to the bridge, Arthur. Tap as the old Chevalier did. I shall cry 'Open!' when we come there. They will let us out and we shall cross the mountains."

The idea in his head remained there ineradicably. Despite the horde of gypsies that was concealed somewhere in the darkened rooms of that weird house, Gavin pushed his way toward the portcullis and demanded that the keeper should open to him. This was the first time he had spoken aloud since he quitted the room where the dead man lay; and instantly at his words the courtyard became alive with the murmur of voices and the sounds of shuffling footsteps.

"Quick, Gavin, they are after us," Kenyon cried, holding his friend's arm and trying to draw him aside to a place of safety.

Gavin would not move, however. Imitating, as well as he could, the voice he had heard so often challenging the keeper of the bridge, he

continued to shout, "Open—I wait!" None the less, he knew that armed men were all about him and that any moment might bring them at his throat.

"Open—I wait!"

The gate-keeper, awakened from a heavy sleep, came from the rude watch-tower above the bridge and stood there with a lantern in his hand. Raising it he looked upon the faces of the men, and drew back with hand uplifted.

"Why do you call to me in my master's voice?" he asked.

They could not answer him. A great shouting in the courtyard behind them warned them that the truth was known. The gypsies had discovered the dead man's body and pell-mell they began to swarm about those they believed to be his assassins. Haggard, in the weird light, their figures in phantom shapes, they pressed on, searching every nook and cranny with the naked blade of sword and scimitar, wailing their doleful lament and encouraging one another to the pursuit. Nor had Gavin any belief that he could escape them. Called by the peril from the unnatural trance which had fallen upon him, he swung round upon his heel as though to protect his friend whose life he had thus jeopardized; but in his heart he believed that nothing could save them. This was the moment when the uttermost penalty of folly must be paid. It found him ready with a dogged courage, but lacking all ideas except that supreme determination too fight for his life to the end.

"Give me the bludgeon, Arthur—I am the stronger."

"Don't think of that—there's something left in my locker still. Side by side, old chap, unto the end. What luck! We'd have been across the bridge in another ten seconds."

"Some of them are going to remember us anyway. Stand close to me, Arthur—it won't be long now."

Indeed one of the gypsies discovered him as he spoke and with a loud cry to the others made known his news. The horde swept on with the ferocity of wolves. Knives gleaming, eyes bright in the darkness, some voices cursing, some howling in brutish anger, they came pell-mell toward the gate. And then, as suddenly, they halted and a silence as of the dead of night fell upon the house.

Some one upon the mountain road without had fired a rifle. The report of it, echoing in the lonely hills, was like a sharp peal of thunder, rattling from peak to peak with monstrous sounds near by and low rumblings far away. To the gypsies it spoke a message which they alone understood. They stood altogether, shivering and gibbering in the darkness. Their muttered words were unintelligible to Gavin. Beyond the sound of the rifle-shot he could hear nothing—or when the silence was broken again, it was by the tongue of wolves indescribably haunting and long drawn as a dirge of woe.

"There is some one on the mountain road and

they are afraid of him," he said quickly to Kenyon.

The idea of profit to come by the truce occurred to him in the same breath; and, crying loudly, again he bade the doorkeeper to open.

"Open, open!"

Twenty voices took up the cry. The gypsies vied with each other in shouting the summons. For they understood the signal. The rope was about their own necks, they said. The last chance was to open the gate to their prisoners. When the doorkeeper hesitated, trembling and afraid, they stabbed him to the heart and he rolled headlong to the foot of the bridge near by which his life had been lived.

But Gavin and Arthur Kenyon passed out to the mountain road, and looking down to the valley they perceived the flame of bivouac fires in the wood below; and they understood immediately that cavalry had been sent from Bukharest to their aid and that the hour of their peril had passed.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DJALA

Evelyn recovered consciousness after that which seemed a very night of evil dreaming, but which was in reality no more than a brief half-hour of insensibility. Greatly weakened by the struggle and the swoon attending it, she lay for some while unable to lift herself upon the bed where they had laid her or to take any notice of the room to which she had been carried. When her strength returned somewhat, and a sudden memory of the circumstances of her visit recurred to her, she sat up immediately, a great fear at her heart and a dread upon her such as she had never suffered before.

What house was it? Who was its owner? What was the meaning of the insult placed upon her? The questions raced through her brain so quickly that she found an answer to none of them. At one time she could almost believe that her own father was privy to the outrage and had led to this desperate course by his detestation of the rôle she played in London. Rejecting this immediately because of her love for him, she was then tempted to say that Odin relied upon his threats and believed that she would submit to him to save Gavin's life. This appeared the more

plausible story. Was not the man from the East a Roumanian with but primitive ideas of a modern civilization and the son of a country wherein women were still little better than the silent victims of men's passions? Perhaps he believed that he could carry her out of England. It might be even that.

She was in a spacious bedroom, furnished, so far as the dim light would permit her to see, in a modern style and with many evidences of later-day luxury. A fresh fire, burning with a light flame in an open grate, cast flashing rays upon darkly-papered walls and the heavy pictures which ornamented them. A sofa had been drawn up before the fire and showed its pattern in the fitful beams; there was an electric chandelier above a dressing-table and a single reading lamp upon a little table by the bedside. Afraid of the darkness in a degree unknown to her, Evelyn tried to find the switch by which the lamp might be lighted; but her cold hands bungled it and, despairing, she rose from the bed and crossed the room toward the heavily-curtained window.

Was escape to be thought of? In sober reason, no; but sober reason says nothing to a woman driven by the supreme dread of wrong and guarding her courage even while she is afraid. Evelyn knew in her own mind that so shrewd and daring a schemer as Count Odin would leave her no loophole, neglect no precaution, nor spare any insult by which his own safety might be assured. She knew it and yet must go to the window and draw the curtains back and touch the heavy shutters

and feel her heart sink when she came to see that they were twice barred and that no woman's hand could open them. Despair alone could have led her to believe that the Count would be so foolish; but despair did not mock her twice and she left the door untried lest she should brand her own intelligence with contempt. Let it be sufficient that she was the prisoner of the house, far from any human aid, alone with her own courage for her friend. She admitted it and sank down upon the sofa, to stretch her hands to the warming blaze, and to breathe that simple prayer to God for aid which is the supreme pathos of womanhood.

The night was silent without the silence of midwinter; the fire blazed as though in enmity to the cold of the early morning hours. Evelyn had no watch, nor did she know what hour it might be. When a distant bell chimed, she caught a faint sound upon the still air, but it told her nothing. And with the passing hours there came upon her a desperation she could not master; a desire to kill this man who had so affronted her, to brave him at whatever cost, even if it were to die at his feet. Etta Romney lived again in this, the Etta of the East, the child of the mountains which knew few laws but those of might. She was her mother's daughter now; the voice of heritage spoke, and she would not still it.

The distant church clock chimed again and she counted three strokes upon its bells. It was three o'clock in the morning then, and another four hours must pass before dawn came. Or would it ever come in that shuttered and curtained room

which she must call her prison? Sometimes she could have wished that the Count would throw down the challenge to her and that she might answer him there and then. Suspense as ever tortured her nerves; but in her case also contributed to the victory of reason. For Gavin's sake the evil in her heart must die, she said. She must act not only as a brave woman but as a wise one. Moreover, her true self, beginning to speak, reminded her that there would be an outcry through all London to-morrow, and that such a man as Count Odin would never face the publicity of it; his one sure weapon was his threat against her lover. At this she cowed and knew that her heart had grown cold again.

Could she, indeed, save Gavin by a word? Had she believed it she would have spoken that word, so greatly did she love. But she did not believe it. Her faith in a brave man's resolution, in his daring and success, remained unshaken. Gavin might even come to this house, she thought; and dreamingly she sat very still by the fireside and listened for the sound of his footstep. A profound silence followed upon the foolish act. When next she moved it was with agitation and a sudden spasm of fear she could not quell.

She was no longer alone in the room. How she had come to believe herself so she could not even imagine. Out of the darkness a pair of jet black eyes were looking up to her own. The wavering firelight becoming stronger as the coal reddened and burst into brighter flame, showed her the huddled figure of a young girl crouching by the

grate and watching her so intently that the very glance seemed a tragedy.

"Djala!" she cried in spite of herself—"Djala, the gypsy girl!"

She knew it was no other and her fear passed with the knowledge. Many a day had she seen this child with the gypsies who had followed the Count to England. That she should be in this house at such a time was the greater mystery. Evelyn knew not whether the omen were good or bad.

"Why do you not speak to me?" she said; "why are you silent?"

The gypsy started up as though the sound of a voice had waked her also from reverie.

"Excellency," she answered, speaking in such broken English that Evelyn caught her meaning with difficulty; "excellency, I wait for my brother and then we will go away."

"Who are you, child—how did you come here?"

"I am Zallony's daughter, excellency—my brother brought me across the sea from my own country."

"Yes, yes, you were in Derbyshire at my father's house. When did you leave there, child?"

"A month ago, excellency. My brother came to London. We had little money and were poor. The Count would follow us, he said. So we waited, but there was no message. Excellency, he should not have treated us so ill, for he was my lover and owes it to me. He should have come to

us, excellency . . . and then I would not have told them. God help him now, for my brother will kill him. Yes, I followed him here, but none knew of it. And to-night I told them the truth. Excellency, had you not come here I never would have told them . . . but I have loved him and he has forgotten, and I must go back to my own country alone and ashamed."

She spoke in such a low tone, the childish eyes were so wide open, the heart beating so rapidly beneath the fine lace which covered her breast, that one who knew nothing of her Eastern birth or of all that the love of a man meant to her, might well have believed her story an hysterical fiction and turned from it with just impatience. To Evelyn, however, it spoke of danger as no other word of all that evil night had done. The peril of the house, the vengeance which might fall upon it—the price of the betrayal, her own silence when a word might save a man from the penalty of his sins—this all flashed through her troubled brain and left her with a new sense of helplessness and surpassing dismay.

"How did you come here; how did you enter this room?" she asked quickly.

"Molines, my uncle, who brought you here—he keeps the keys, excellency."

"Then he let you in—he knows of your being here?"

"He knows, excellency, and is afraid. We must save the English lady, he said. That is why he sent me to you."

"I must see your uncle at once, Djala. . . .

I must tell the Count. What you speak of is a great crime. Let us make them hear us. Oh, my God, we cannot be silent."

The doubt and suspense of it all became overwhelming, and she stood groping in the dim light for the doorway and beating upon it with both her hands. No one, however, answered her. The little gypsy crouching by the fire seemed afraid to move or to speak. The silence of the house remained unbroken. Evelyn turned away in such despair as seemed to her scarcely human.

"When is your brother coming here?" she asked the child.

Djala answered without looking up.

"I do not know, but he will come, excellency . . . and he will speak for me to the Count. Yes, and then——"

The words were stilled upon her lips and she sat up to listen. A sound of men's voices suddenly made itself audible in the room below. The gypsy heard it first and spoke no more of her vengeance.

"That is my brother's voice," she said—and then, realizing what she had done, she caught at Evelyn's dress with both her hands and implored her pity.

"Save him, excellency, for Christ's dear sake, save the man I love," she implored.

"I cannot save him, Djala—am I not as helpless as you? . . . I cannot save him."

They waited together, hand in hand, listening to the story which the voices told them. Now it would be to the voice of argument, then to that of

entreaty, ultimately to the swift interchange of phrase which spoke of anger. When the duologue ceased, the silence had greater terrors of doubt than any they had yet suffered. What had happened, then? Why did none come to them? They could but hope that reason had prevailed.

"Let us light a lamp, excellency; I am afraid of the dark."

"I cannot do it, Djala. . . . I cannot find the switch."

"Let us try together, excellency—how your hands tremble! And mine are cold, so cold. Let us try to find the light."

They felt along the wall, gathering courage from their occupation. The main switch was upon the landing outside the door, but they found the plug of the bedside lamp and managed to fix it, getting for their reward a little aureole of light upon the bed and greater shadows upon the further walls. That, however, which pleased them better was a green silken bell-rope hanging down by the bedside and revealed now by the lamp. Evelyn took the cord in both her hands and pulled it thrice. But no bell rang.

"It is broken, Djala; they did not mean us to ring it—hush—listen—they are talking again—that is the Count's voice . . ."

She caught the child's hand impulsively and drew her to the door as though it would help them to hear the voices more plainly. The controversy below had been resumed suddenly and with a bare preface of civil words. Loud above the other the Count's voice could be heard in threat-

ening expostulation. It ceased upon a haunting cry—lingering, horrible, and to be heard by the imagination long after it had died away.

Djala did not speak when she heard the cry; she seemed as one transfixed by terror, unable to move from the place and afraid to learn the the truth. Presently low sobs escaped her; she became hysterical and sank at Evelyn's feet, moaning and trembling.

"They have killed him, excellency . . . oh, my God, my God!"

Evelyn could answer nothing. Stooping, she lifted the fainting girl and laid her upon the bed. While she was not less afraid or distressed than the gypsy, this nearer danger had quickened her faculties and awakened her to action. Once more, though the act seemed folly, she caught at the silken bell-rope and pulled it with all her strength. The answer was a jarring tintinabulation heard clearly in the silence. She stood to listen and knew that footsteps were approaching the landing. Then the key turned in the lock and a man, whom she had seen before, a Tzigany beyond all question, entered without ceremony.

"Lady," he said in broken English, "come with me—you must leave this house."

"I will not go until I know the truth; I cannot leave the child," she said, pointing to Djala.

"There are those who will care for her. As for the truth . . . it is a man's quarrel. They will be friends to-morrow, lady. Obey me and go quickly."

"I will not leave the child," she protested—not

knowing whether his story were false or true and fearing greatly.

For answer, he took her by the arm menacingly and drew her toward the door.

"Go before ill befall you. The child is our daughter. Are we of the people who do not care for their own children? Go, lest worse follow! The man will live—I, Molines, say it."

The words found her without argument. This child had been with the gypsies at the Manor. What harm would befall her if she remained with them here? And it was no time for woman's pity. The story of the house lay upon her as a heavy shadow. She had the desire to flee far from it; to blot it out of her dreams; to forget its humiliations; to escape its darkness. A voice called her to the way of salvation and she went with the gypsy.

"The carriage will take you as you came," he said; "ask no questions, lady; do not betray us if you value your life and that of another. That which has happened in this house to-night will never be known to the world. Seek not the story, for it is not yours to seek."

She had no rejoinder for him. There were lamps still alight in the hall as they descended the staircase and the door of a room upon the right hand side was a little way open. Evelyn half-believed that she saw the body of a man lying upon the table there as she passed swiftly by; but the door closed immediately and the gypsy hurried her from the house.

"Remember," he said, "be silent . . . it is your only hope, lady."

She shuddered and drew away from him. The electric brougham which had carried her from the theatre now rolled slowly up the drive. She entered it without a word and so was driven swiftly away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SHADOW OF THE RIVER

It wanted an hour of dawn when Evelyn quitted the lonely house. She had given no instructions to the driver, nor did he appear to expect any. In truth, his orders were very far from being in accordance with the old gypsy's promise. A deed of blood had been done and the daylight would discover it. The woman who could tell something of the story would tell it at once if liberty were given her. So said those who entrapped her . . . and, desiring to withhold liberty as long as might be, they sent the carriage westward, away toward Harrow and the villages.

Evelyn herself did not suspect this; nor would it have alarmed her had she done so. As one awakened from a dream of death, she tried to shut the picture of the house from her heavy eyes, to drown the cries she had heard, to forget the humiliations. Dark and lonely as the way was, the black shapes of the trees seemed emblems of her liberty; the silent houses so many tokens of the world regained. She cared not where or why, so long as she might breathe the sweet air and tell herself that God's mercy had saved her. For Gavin would she live—her whole life should be spent in quest of the man she loved;

of one who seemed to call her even from the darkness. And of Gavin were her thoughts when the carriage stopped at last and the driver bade her descend.

She perceived him to be an African, of pleasant face and starlike eyes. To all her questions, however, he did but shake his head and show grinning teeth which would as well become a snarl as laughter, she thought. It was dawn then, and there were gray mists drifting above the hedges. They had stopped in a lane and nothing human was in sight.

"Very sorry, missy—go back now. No far to go, master says so."

"Where are we, where have you brought me?" she asked, obeying him in some fear.

He answered her, still grinning:

"You get back to London, quick, missee. Master says so. Dis am his carriage. Verry sorry, missy."

She perceived that he played a part and would contend with him no more. Still nodding his black head and showing his white teeth, he turned the carriage about and disappeared down the lane. When the rolling sound of the wheels had quite died away, Evelyn began to walk along the lane in that which she believed to be the direction of London. The mists lifted as the sun began to warm them. She was terribly cold, chilled to the very bone, and exhausted both bodily and mentally; but she pushed on bravely and presently out of the mists a cottage appeared and then another. Yet a hundred yards farther down the

lane and she espied some modern villas in the Queen Anne style and after that quite a considerable village lying in the hollow.

It would have been about eight o'clock of the morning by this time; and workmen passed her with the firm tread and the cheery "Good-morning, miss," which are still to be seen and heard within ten miles of the metropolis. At first she scarcely had the courage to ask where she was; for she realized how strangely the question must fall upon other ears at such a time and under such circumstances; but plucking up her courage presently as a lad approached her, she stopped him and learned that this was the village of Pinner, and that it lay just thirteen miles from London.

"Yonder's the station, miss, just round there to the right. I suppose you've walked over from Harrow. Lots of ladies do now they've took to hockey. I don't like that—not me. It hurts the shins unless you've got thick 'uns like the new girls has."

He was quite a conversationalist, the boy, and he rambled on with a precise account of his own intimate affairs, dating from the happy anniversary of a present of five shillings from a gentleman in a "broke-in-half" motor car to the recent arrival of a little sister, with whom he expected he would shortly quarrel. One of his most cheerful items of information was that which revealed the near proximity of an inn, styled by him "a public"; but which, nevertheless, brought to Evelyn such visions of hot steaming coffee and new warm bread and a fireside

whereby she might thaw her frozen hands that she bestowed a whole shilling upon him willingly; and for that he, as a true cavalier, conducted her immediately to the hostelry.

"And I do hope you'll walk over from Harrow another morning, and that I'll meet you in the lane," he said with an interested and mercenary laugh delightful to hear. It was good after all to listen to the sound of an honest voice. And this boy spoke in the accustomed tongue of men.

She found the people of the inn awake and bustling. The story told for her by the loquacious lad was a very *open sesame*. A dear old lady with a very dirty face ushered her into a prim parlor and put out the Sunday tea service. Workmen in the bar raised their voices for her benefit, and one of them narrated at length how formerly he had kept a servant at "twenty shilling a week, same as you get, Bill." The coffee, however, could not have been better. Evelyn drank it greedily, and, learning that there were trains to London frequently, she caught one at ten o'clock and by a little after half-past she was in a hansom going down to Baker Street.

Her direction to the cabman had been "the Carlton Theatre"—why exactly she could not say. Naturally, she felt shy for the moment of returning to her hotel, dishevelled and weary as she was. The theatre would be open, she knew; for a rehearsal had been called at twelve o'clock, and the great Mr. Izard expected her there to hear of a new play which he had already passed as "bully." Fortunately for her, she slipped by

old Jacob at the stage door so quietly that he was quite unaware of her presence . . . and then going to her own dressing-room, to her chagrin she discovered it to be locked and remembered that her maid had the key.

They had set a scene upon the stage, the garden scene of "Haddon Hall"; and weird and cold and melancholy was its aspect in this morning light. To Evelyn it seemed as an emblem of those scenes of her girlhood which she had forever quitted. The loneliness of her life, the pity of it, the quenched fires of ambition—thoughts of these came to her one by one and said "there is no longer hope in the world." Etta Romney, that daughter of passion and the soul's unrest, love had killed her, and never would she be reborn. There stood in her place an Evelyn who believed herself to be utterly alone, forsaken of all, even of him who had taught her the supreme lesson of her being. For her father she had an abiding pity. The harvest he had reaped had been of his own sowing; but her affection for him rose above any consideration of judgment and she accused herself because she had left him in the hour of trial. For the rest the dreadful story of the night remained her chief burden. To whom should she tell it; who must be her confidant? Should she run hysterically to the police, saying, "I believe that a crime has been committed in an unknown house at Hampstead?" To whose profit? The two men might have met in fair fight according to the custom of their country. And would anyone be found in the house by even the

cleverest detective after those hours had passed? She knew not which would be the prudent course. Her own despair spoke louder than any claim of human justice.

The great Mr. Izard appeared at the theatre at eleven o'clock. His first cheery greeting to her ended abruptly when he perceived the state of distress into which she had fallen . . . her haggard eyes, her white face, the restlessness of mood and quick changing attitudes which betrayed her.

"Miss Romney!" he exclaimed aghast, "are you ill, my dear? . . . Good God! what has happened?"

"I cannot play to-day," she said. . . . "I am going to my home, Mr. Izard, to my father. I shall never play in your theatre again. My acting days are done."

He saw that she was really ill and would not trouble her with any of the old arguments. His own carriage, he said, should take her to the station. Her assurance that she would go down to Derbyshire alone troubled him, for he was a big-hearted man, as most of his kind. When Evelyn left him, she knew that she was leaving a friend . . . and how few friends has any man or woman among us! Perhaps the truth of this helped her upon her long journey to Derbyshire. She was going to her father, to him who had loved her . . . she was going to him to tell him every word of that story and to say to him, "Take me to Gavin, let us go together and forget that another has ever come between us."

All else in the world, its rewards, its prizes, its teachings, seemed less to her than this gospel of love now warming her heart to life and bidding her look up. By it should peace come to him—to them both if Gavin lived!

Ah, if Gavin lived! How often by the way did that voice of doubt cry the question in her ears? As a heavy cloud upon the garden of her hopes so the thought recurred and would not be put away. If Gavin lived! Evelyn heard the words wherever she turned; they were spoken to her upon the breezes of that winter day, rolled out by the humming wheels as the train carried her northward, uttered by unknown voices which compelled her to listen. They followed her to Moretown; they were with her when she dismissed the hired carriage at the gates of Melbourne Hall and set out to walk across the park toward her home. Her desire to enter the house without observation or effusive welcome was in great part the fruit of her thoughts. She must be alone; she must have the full command of herself before she told her father the true story of yesternight.

The sun had set upon a glorious winter's day; a day of clear skies and bright scenes and fresh invigorating breezes. Now when eve fell the west wind ebbed away with the hours and left a twilight deeply still and beautiful. Not a branch of the leafless trees stirred in all that vast park about Melbourne Hall. Wide vistas of glade and avenue might have known no human foot since their story began. The deer browsed

or moved with step so light that the quickest ear could not detect it. To Evelyn it mattered not whether she trod the park at dawn or dusk. Every landmark seemed as her own possession. Here was the dell wherein, long ago, she had played Di Vernon's part to the summer skies; there, the arbor to which she had carried the romances upon which her young imagination feasted. Far away, dark and gray between the trees, stood her home, offering her so chill a welcome that her heart sank wearily and tears came to her burning eyes. How if her father also had left her; if she found the great house empty and the gates of it shut! Such an end to her journey was not impossible; but the dread of it was in itself a heavy sorrow.

To be alone even at the gates of her home. Yes, it might be that. Standing upon the little bridge that spanned the river, she listened to its melancholy song and echoed it in her heart. Alone, it said—the dream lived, love lost, the world empty. What mattered it now that God's providence had saved her yesternight? Better, she thought in her distress, that she lay in yonder silent pool, drifting upon the slow eddies to rest and oblivion. For what had the world to give her? The tears flowed fast at the remembrance of all she had hoped, all she had suffered, all she had lost. "Gavin," she cried aloud, "save me, Gavin, for I cannot live alone."

. . . . . .

He came to her swiftly out of the darkness.

But yesterday he had returned from Bukharest and, just as she to-day, had gone to Melbourne Hall to find it shuttered and empty. A good act of his destiny made it known to him at Moretown station that the Lady Evelyn had returned from London. He followed her swiftly and overtook her upon the bridge.

And so as in the dream of the unforgotten days he took her from the shadow of the river to his heart and, holding her close, he said:

"Evelyn, beloved, I am here as you wish."

"Evelyn, beloved, I am here as you wish." Chap. 34.

EPILOGUE

THE DOCTOR DRINKS A TOAST

In the Spring of the year following upon Gavin Ord's return from Bukharest, the Reverend Harry Fillimore playing, as he claimed, "the game of his life" upon the links at Moretown, found himself to his chagrin both oblivious of the troubles of others and utterly unsympathetic toward his old friend Doctor Philips.

"My dear fellow," he would say, "what can you expect when you will take your eye off the ball? Now do be patient. For my sake, be patient."

The doctor, driving his ball with savage ferocity into a deep and awful pit, treated these observations with the just scorn they merited. He neither criticised nor contested them; but having struck the offending ball five times with little result, he picked it up deliberately and uttered a remark which the vulgar at any rate might have considered appropriate.

"She's at Gibraltar," he said without preface.

"Come, dear fellow—now do be patient. I will not encourage strong language; you know that I will not."

Dr. Philips laughed such a melancholy laugh

that even the good-natured parson looked up from his beloved ball.

"I was talking of the Lady Evelyn," he said quietly.

"I'm sorry—I'd forgotten it, Fred."

"Oh, well, memory isn't a jewel in these cases. I had a letter from the Earl this morning—eh, yes? He says the yacht's become a nest of turtle-doves. They're going on to Malta if the weather's not too hot. He doesn't mean to come here at all this year, you see. That's what I wanted to tell you. It seems that the man Odin went back to Bukharest and is now fighting the Government for his father's property. They confiscated it or something, according to the criminal law there. Pity the gypsies didn't kill him at Hampstead—eh? They seem to have come pretty near it by all accounts."

The vicar expressed the opinion that the gypsies were the only honest men that Bukharest would be likely to send to Moretown; but neither spoke of Evelyn again until they were alone with their cigars after dinner that night. Then, as a sacred confidence between them, Harry Fillimore confessed something that had long been on his mind.

"Father and daughter," he said, "shared the burden of a terrible heritage. One might have said that they had been born under an Eastern sun and had inherited Eastern passions. In all of us, as the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson believed, there are two personalities—the good and the evil; and our lives are lived as we conquer

the one and foster the other. Robert Forrester never made an honest effort to extirpate those weaker traits of character which ruined his career at the beginning. Evelyn, on her part, did not realize the meaning of her life until Gavin Ord taught her to love him. Her escapade in London, the craving for light and music and glitter . . . there you had the East speaking to her. But the man's voice was the voice of the West, and she listened to it. Such a woman has found peace or none will ever find it. Her will has saved both herself and her father. Let us grudge her nothing of her happiness, Fred. You loved her? What man that had not loved would not? But you'll wish a blessing on her and lift a glass to her as I do, just because you're what you are—a great big-hearted Englishman, who will share his joys with all, but will tell his sorrows to none."

The doctor turned his head away. Very slowly and deliberately he filled his glass, and, lifting it, he said:

"God bless her!"

THE END

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